THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF WILLIAM ROBERTSON SMITH, 1846-1894

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ABSTRACT

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This study of the thought of the Scottish Biblical critic and theologian, W. Robertson Smith, examines the background of his ideas and places his life in the context of nineteenth century religious and intellectual developments. The major source materials used are Smith's scholarly works, including his unpublished MSS and correspondence (located in the Cambridge University Library), and the writings of thinkers known to have influenced Smith. Particular attention is given to the relation of Smith's thought to the problems posed for Christian theology by the historicism that so profoundly conditioned the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century.

Smith acquired his dominant intellectual convictions from diverse sources. Through his rearing in a manse of the Scottish Free Church, he acquired a lasting respect for an evangelical Calvinism as expressed in The Westminster Confession. Under A. B. Davidson, at the Free Church College, Edinburgh, Smith was introduced to the higher critical approach to the Old Testament. Studies in Germany under Albrecht Ritschl, and his reading in the theological tradition stemming from Schleiermacher, led him to adopt a view of Divine revelation in

personalistic, non-propositional terms which, though decidedly removed from the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy commonly held by Free Church theologians, served to free the hands of the Biblical critic. Smith's thinking was also shaped by the epistemological convictions he derived from his studies in Kantian philosophy. The ramifications of a dualism that sharply differentiated between scientific and religious modes of apprehension were evident throughout Smith's works.

Smith's conversion from a conservative view of Old Testament history to one in agreement with the Graf-Wellhausen-Kuenen reconstruction of that history is traced through his lecture notes and publications for the years 1870 to 1875. His trial for heresy following the publication of his matured views in 1875 is treated largely from the standpoint of his effort to reconcile the method and results of higher criticism with the theology of his Church as defined in The Westminster Confession.

The anthropological theories Smith developed during his tenure as editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica and as professor of Arabic at Cambridge were heavily indebted to the theological and philosophical presuppositions he had adopted in early manhood. This continuity was evident, for instance, in his stress on the religious life of the community, rather than on the psychology of the individual, his view of primitive sacrifice as a form of communion with the god, and his assumption that ritual was prior to myth and dogma; such ideas, if substantiated by Smith's research in Semitic anthropology, were no less dependent on his own presuppositions about the nature of religious phenomena. In his employment of the comparative method and in his interest in totemism and kinship systems, Smith was much indebted to

the work of his friend John F. McLennan. The linking of totemism with a communion theory of sacrifice proved to be one of Smith's most influential conceptions.

This study concludes that though Smith's thought provided a microcosmic view of many broad intellectual trends in the nineteenth century, his own effort to reconcile the newer scientific and historical insights with the more traditional forms of Christian faith was ultimately unsuccessful. At least in part this was due to Smith's acceptance of a dualistic epistemology which in effect divorced the truth of the Christian revelation from the reliability of the facts recorded in its history. Smith's religious epistemology with its emphasis on subjective means of verification would be powerless against the Feuerbachian reduction of theology to anthropology. In fact, Smith's contribution to the sociology of religious knowledge unwittingly gave empirical support to Feuerbach's psychogenetic theory of religion.

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INTRODUCTION

The following study arose from the writer's interest both in nineteenth century intellectual history and in the religion of the Bible. Specifically it is concerned with the impact of the modern historical consciousness on Christianity's claim to be grounded in an historical revelation. The life and thought of the Scottish Biblical scholar, William Robertson Smith, provided the focus for observing this problem as it emerged into the awareness of nineteenth century theology and Biblical studies.

For several reasons the life of Robertson Smith was a suitable subject for exploring the problem of faith and history. Though reared in a Church yet untainted by the more corrosive acids of modernity, in early manhood Smith made the transition, in which so many would follow him, from the pre-critical dependence upon an infallible Bible to the new understanding which accepted the method and results of the higher criticism. In our first two chapters we have attempted to discern the theological and philosophical influences which prepared Smith for a changed view of religious authority. Smith was of interest, too, because having made the transition he was firmly convinced that a rapproachment between evangelical Christianity and an epistemology that did not shrink from the claims of historicism was both desirable and possible. Smith's effort to effect this harmonious relationship and to commend it to his fellow churchmen provided the substance for much of

this study, particularly in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Five is a study of Smith's contribution to the study of primitive religion with special attention paid to the influence of his theological presuppositions and historicist orientation on his research.

The chapters thus are organized around the major segments of Smith's intellectual development. In each we first sketch out the broad cultural and religious currents amid which Smith found himself in the successive phases of his life. Then we trace the course which his own thought took as he learned from this environment, reacted to it, and sought to change it.

Of particular value in preparing this study was the exceptionally fine biography, The Life of William Robertson Smith, completed in 1912 by John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal, both men who had an intimate first-hand acquaintance with Smith. The present work differs from this official Life in several ways. While omitting many interesting details about Smith's physical circumstances and social relationships, it concentrates rather on Smith's intellectual history, analyzing products from his prolific pen only mentioned in passing by his first biographers. Moreover, the Life suffers from an understandable degree of historical myopia. Hopefully it has been possible for the writer to achieve a degree of critical detachment and historical perspective not available to Black and Chrystal.

Also of interest in the preparation of this study was the doctoral dissertation by Jesse Hunchberger Brown, The Contribution of William Robertson Smith to Old Testament Scholarship with Special Emphasis on Higher Criticism, completed in the Duke University Department of Religion in 1964. While Dr. Brown wrote with a special interest

in "Smith's contribution to the advancement of Old Testament criticism," the present study lays stress on the union between Smith and certain spirits of his age, a union that cannot uncritically be assumed to have resulted in unmitigated advancement. Also, this study profits from the use of the Smith MSS whereas Dr. Brown's does not.

CHAPTER I

SMITH'S BACKGROUND AND EARLY EDUCATION

William Robertson Smith lived in a time of momentous religious change, a time when a shift in the spiritual moorings was occurring throughout Western Christendom. This upheaval was experienced nowhere with greater anguish of soul and strife of intellect than in the Great Britain of Smith's day. Smith's biography is so intimately related to this crisis as to be in itself a microcosmic study of the vaster movements within Western Civilization. The cultural evangelicalism in which Smith was reared with its concern for personal salvation and its belief in the supreme authority of the Bible exemplified a genus of religious life as old as Christianity. On the other hand the world into which Smith emerged as a young man in the 1860's was torn by conflicts over the viability of this heritage. Religious and secular currents of thought had begun to work a revolution demanding a reorientation of values on a massive scale. In this chapter we will depict the older, pre-revolutionary environment in which Smith was nurtured and whose best insights he never quite gave up. We will also attempt a sketch of the shape of the new intellectual epoch that Smith embraced and eventually influenced in no small degree.

The Historical Consciousness and the Nineteenth Century Religious Crisis

When in the second half of the nineteenth century Darwinism,

higher criticism, and comparative study of religions shook the foundations of the Christian faith, some observers were convinced that Biblical authority had crumbled beyond repair; others were certain firmer ground was found even while the tremors and shifts were being felt.[1] Both those who abetted the attack on Christianity and those who attempted to rear more adequate theological formulations were under the sway of that most pervasive characteristic of the nineteenth century Zeitgeist, its consciousness of historical development and its fascination with the historical method.[2]

No doubt the historical consciousness of the nineteenth century was a heightened expression of Western Man's age old effort to orient his existence in relation to a meaningful duration in time. But there are occasions when a change in degree may produce a change in kind. The historicist understanding of knowledge which developed in the last century was such a revolutionary change. The Christian religion, though largely responsible for giving Western Civilization its peculiar sense of history and interest in history, itself fell into the vortex of this radical historicism.

A religion that claimed to be rooted in a sequence of historical events and that venerated a collection of ancient documents could hardly hope to escape the critical study that nineteenth century

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[1]Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Collins, 1964), suggests that the nineteenth century was a time of unparalleled reconstruction in Christian theology.

[2]Clement Charles Julian Webb, A Study of Religious Thought in England from 1850 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 18-20. Vernon Faithful Storr, The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913), p. 116.

scholars exercised upon it. From one angle the freshly acquired historical sense of the time seemed to open up new means of apprehending and commending Christian truth. With the aid of historical science would men not more clearly see the hand of God as he shaped His Kingdom in the world? As one scholar suggested the time was ripe to "widen the idea of revelation, . . . not removing the footsteps of the Eternal from Palestine but tracing them on other shores. . . ."[3] From another angle the historical consciousness raised certain problems for a religion based on particular historical revelations. The historicist revolution demanded that every concept and every institution submit unflinchingly to the caustic acids of historical criticism. This meant that religious claims which for believers in times past were true beyond a shadow of doubt were now matters to be rendered more or less probable by historical research. The issue was deeper than the calling into question of specific episodes of Biblical history. A radical question about the authority and significance of the Bible as a whole was raised when the certitude of the believer was made to rest in the relativities of historical research and interpretation.

Moreover, the historical method apparently could not be the mere handmaiden of theology.[4] The development of an historical

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[3]Rowland Williams, "Bunsen's Biblical Researches," Essays and Reviews (London: Longman, Green, Longmans, 1861), p. 51.

[4]Carl L. Becker was of the opinion that theology along with all sense of transcendent meaning had been ultimately swallowed up by historical relativism. "Theology," he wrote, "or something that goes under that name is still kept alive by the faithful, but only by artificial respiration. Its function, the services it rendered in the time of St. Thomas, have been taken over not by philosophy, but by history--the study of man and his world in time sequence. . . . No doubt St. Thomas was aware that one thing followed another. What is peculiar to

perspective meant that theological claims became phenomena to be understood in relation to the thought forms, philosophical presuppositions, and literary fashions of the times and places where they first arose. Once this was admitted the task could scarcely be avoided of trying to transcend the relativities of time and place by separating the essence of such claims from their historically conditioned accidents. But what then becomes of Christianity's claim to have a theology grounded in uniquely revelatory historical events?[5]

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the modern mind is the disposition and determination to regard ideas and concepts, the truth of things as well as things themselves, as changing entities, the character and significance of which at any given time can be fully grasped only by regarding them as points in an endless process of differentiation, of unfolding, of waste and repair." The epigram for the modern intellectual situation, said Becker, was "Whirl is King, having deposed Zeus." Carl L. Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp. 15-17.

[5]Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who was among the first to sense the radical shift in the foundations of knowledge which historicism was effecting, welcomed it joyfully as the means of an ultimate liberation from dogma. He wrote, "The historical consciousness of the finitude of every historical phenomena, of every human or social condition and of the relativity of every kind of faith, is the last step toward the liberation of man. With it man achieves the sovereignty to enjoy every experience to the full and surrender himself to it unencumbered, as if there were no system of philosophy or faith to tie him down. Life is freed from knowledge through concepts; the mind becomes sovereign over the cobwebs of dogmatic thought." Wilhelm Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society, ed. H. P. Rickman (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 167. See also Lynn White, Jr., "Christian Myth and Christian History," Journal of the History of Ideas, II (1942), 145-58. Mircea Eliade, a contemporary student of comparative religions, by contrast with Dilthey, has written of the "terror of history" as it is experienced by modern, "liberated," man. He writes that, "Historicism arises as a decomposition product of Christianity; it accords decisive importance to the historical event (which is an idea whose origin is Christian) but to the historical event as such, that is, by denying it any possibility of revealing a transhistorical, soteriological intent." He goes on to say that, "time in these modern philosophies once again wears the terrifying aspect that it wore in Indian and Greek philosophies of the eternal return. Definitely desacralized, time presents itself as a precarious and evanescent duration,

The question indeed has to be asked whether the autonomy claimed by the historian and the shifting sands and relativities of historical research were compatible with the absolute authority Christianity ascribed to Biblical revelation. Lessing had located this issue on the intellectual terrain of the late eighteenth century. The absolute claims of the Christian religion and the merely probable assertions of its history, he said, were separated by an "ugly, broad, ditch" which, try though he might, he could not cross.[6] Crossing that ditch is not the least of the problems that have since occupied the historically minded theologian.

The nineteenth century religious crisis has often been framed in terms of a conflict between religion and natural science,[7] but this matter, as well, is more comprehensively viewed in the light of the confluence of history and religion. The sciences that raised the greatest difficulties for the Christian religion were precisely those that had taken on new life by an infusion of historical consciousness. Uniformitarian geology and evolutionary biology were sciences governed by temporal categories. They sought to explain existing phenomena by

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leading irremediably to death." Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957), pp. 112-13. See also Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), pp. 147-62.

[6]Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and the Power," Lessing's Theological Writings, Selections in translation with an introductory essay by Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).

[7]The classical statement is Andrew Dickson White, A History of of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897).

their genesis and development in time.[8] Scientific theories advanced in these historical and evolutionary terms necessarily collided with the conventional approach to the Bible.

In the early years of the century the formation of the earth's crust was still being accounted for by geologists as the result of several distinct, abrupt acts of creation--successive providential catastrophies that had brought the earth to that perfection of design making it a fit home for mankind. The Noahic flood was understood as but the most recent of these catastrophies borne out by geological data.[9] Then in 1830 appeared the first volume of Sir Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology. Without worrying overmuch about the Mosaic chronology or the Noahic flood, Lyell attempted to demonstrate that all geological phenomena could be accounted for if only existing natural agents were given sufficient time to do their work. Laying aside the catastrophy hypothesis, he said the past should be studied as though it were analogous to the present. Since such "uniformitarianism" in the study of history was not limited to geology in its application, we should mark well Lyell's premise "that all former changes of the organic and inorganic are referrable to the uninterrupted succession of physical events, governed by laws now in operation. . . ."[10] Geology was henceforth the study of the history of the earth's slow but uniform

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[8]Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress, and Decadence (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1966), p. 6.

[9]Charles Coulston Gillispie, Genesis and Geology (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 89-120.

[10]Charles Lyell, Principles of Geology (3 vols.; 1830-33), I, 144. Quoted in Gillispie, op. cit., p. 126.

evolution through aeons of time to its present state.

The conflict between Lyell's summa geologica and the defenders of a Biblical cosmogony, however, was but an opening salvo. The main battles ensued after the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859. Darwin accounted for all biological differentiation in terms of the historical evolution of life forms within their environments. The religious import of Darwin's theory was by no means limited to its blatant contradiction of the literal fiat creationism that multitudes of Christians saw in their Genesis. For Darwin the biological world was a disteleological realm, prodigal in its waste, and surging with a blind and inexorably developing life force. If Darwin's doctrine of natural selection through incessant struggle was admitted (the clue for which came from Parson Malthus' Essay on Population), the whole Christian teaching about God's providential and fatherly care for the creation seemed to evaporate.[11] But not all religious people were so discomfited by Darwinism. There were minds in which the metaphysics of the Hegelian school had been doing its leavening task and others in which an optimistic faith in the march of technology was too deeply ingrained to be perturbed by a problem of theodicy. For some, the Origin of Species was readily assimilated into a theology of immanence.

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[11] Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England from Newman to Martineau, 1850-1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 174-75. R. H. Hutton summed up the problem of theodicy implicit in Darwinism as follows: "Men ask how an omniscient mind which knows precisely what is wanted can set Nature groping her way forward as if she were blind, to find the path of least resistance. And again, they ask how, if bad only becomes good by steady starvation of the worse, it is possible to see in this process the cherishing love of a divine creator." Quoted in Herbert Wood, Belief and Unbelief Since 1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 52.

"God was sought, not above but below, not without but within. He was not detached from the human consciousness. He is the Eternal Subject, occupying the innermost shrine of man's spirit to be discovered by an intuitive awareness."[12] The romantic temperament, the unfolding of the Hegelian Absolute, the evolution of animal life and of human societies to ever higher forms, a secularized redemption guaranteed by the historical process, these it was thought were worthy ingredients for a newer and better religion than traditional Christianity. And more wonderful still, some scholars were heard to say that the Bible itself, when properly interpreted by higher criticism, would give its full weight of authority to this religion of divinity struggling to be born in the midst of history.

Narrowing our discussion, we can understand the profound religious disquiet in Victorian Great Britain posed by historicism in its several guises only if two important factors are noted. The historical consciousness and the philosophical and theological developments which gave it wide currency on the Continent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was little understood in Great Britain until the 1860's.[13] The majority of people were utterly ignorant of the spiritual

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[12]H. D. McDonald, Ideas of Revelation: An Historical Study, 1700-1860 (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1959), pp. 14-15. Webb, op. cit., sees the notion of divine immanence as the central characteristic in the religious life of the period.

[13]Of course there were some few exceptions. In 1845, on the eve of his conversion to the Roman communion, John Henry Newman wrote The Development of Christian Doctrine to demonstrate that there is evidence of a continuous unfolding of development linking the modern Roman Catholic Church at every doctrinal point with the primitive Church. Though considerably pre-Darwinian, the work is resplendent with biological analogies. It has been called "the first attempt in England to apply to theology the idea of development." Storr, op. cit., pp. 294-95.

revolution that had taken place across the Channel.[14] Even among theologians it was common to dispose of the new ideas by lumping them together as "rationalistic" or as "German poison." Until the 1860's, it has been said "the leading English Churchmen, . . . were proceeding upon the theory that the waters which cut off England from the continent . . . were a sufficient protection for peace-loving orthodoxy against any invasion of Teutonic higher criticism."[15] When the full blown theories of continental religious and Biblical scholarship were first given a wide hearing in the third quarter of the century, it is little wonder that an explosive controversy ensued.

The second factor to be noted was the conception of Biblical authority that prevailed in British Christianity. Before 1860 the idea of an infallibly inerrant scripture was all but unanimously held by Christians.[16] The spirited response to the series of challenges that this doctrine faced in the sixties and seventies is evidence of the vigor with which it was held. Indeed, the doctrine of an infallible Bible, though of ancient lineage, seemed to have taken on a more definitive form in the face of threatening developments.[17]

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[14] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[15] Leroy Waterman, "A Half-Century of Biblical and Semitic Investigation," American Journal of Semitic Languages, XXXII (1916), 219.

[16] H. D. McDonald, Theories of Revelation, 1860-1960 (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1963), p. 196.

[17] Just as the Catholic Church responded to the threats from modern culture by the promulgation in 1870 of the dogma of papal infallibility, thus giving a more formal and uncompromising face to a view long entertained in the Church, so the Protestant understanding of the authority may have undergone a not dissimilar development due to some of the same problems. For an exposition of this theory in reference to American fundamentalism see Ernest R. Sandeen, "The Princeton Theology,"

The logic of the case was simple. If the Bible was God's word written and God is a God of truth then the Bible must be without error. This was the position of non-conformist and Anglican alike. In 1861 Dean Burgon, an Oxford theologian, wrote:

> The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it (where are we to stop?), every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him who sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme.[18]

Nor was the Dean alone in the length to which he carried such claims of inerrancy. A manual used in training Anglican divinity students made such assertions as follow:

> Modern science, with all its wonderful advances, has discovered not one single inaccurate allusion to physical truth, in all the countless illustrations employed in the Bible. . . .
>
> The Bible cannot be less than verbally inspired. Every word, every syllable, every letter, is just what it would be, had God spoken from Heaven without any human intervention. . . .
>
> Every scientific statement is infallibly accurate, and all its history and narratives of every kind are without any inaccuracy. The words and phrases have a grammatical and philological accuracy, such as is possessed by no human composition.[19]

When in the early sixties wave upon wave of attack on such teaching was being felt not less than eleven thousand clergymen signed the Oxford Declaration affirming that the whole Bible was God's very word.[20]

Church History, XXXI (1962), 307-21, and "Toward a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," Church History, XXXVI (1967), 66-83.

[18] Inspiration and Interpretation, p. 89, as quoted in J. Estlin Carpenter, The Bible in the Nineteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903), p. 7.

[19] Quoted by John William Colenso, The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined (7 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1863), II, 11.

[20] W. Neil, "The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible,"

The first major public controversy in England over the application of the canons of literary and historical criticism to the understanding of the Bible came the year after Origin of Species had focused attention on the relation of science to the Bible. In 1860 seven leading Anglican Churchmen cooperated in the writing of an incendiary little volume with the non-committal title, Essays and Reviews. The provocative tone of some of the articles has been aptly described as "an attempt to let in fresh air by breaking a window."[21] Indeed it was the conscious intention of the writers to "break down the conspiracy of silence" that had kept otherwise educated people in England in ignorance of the revolutionary developments that had long before occurred in German theology and Biblical study.[22] "We do not wish," wrote Benjamin Jowett, "to do anything rash or irritating to the public or to the University, but we are determined not to submit to this abominable system of terrorism, which prevents the statement of the plainest facts and makes true theology or theological education impossible."[23] Jowett's contribution, "The Interpretation of Scripture," was perhaps the most judicial and perceptive of the lot. He made a plea for the desirability of reading the Bible with critical acumen and of interpreting it like any other ancient document. Jowett's intention was

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Cambridge History of the Bible, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 263.

[21]Wood, op. cit., p. 64.

[22]Leonard E. Elliott-Binns, English Thought 1860-1900: The Theological Aspect (Greenwich: The Seabury Press, 1956), p. 24.

[23]Quoted in Bernard M. G. Reardon (ed.), Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 309.

broadly evangelical for he feared the current equation of criticism with atheism would drive educated men from the Church.[24] One of those whose contribution led to his trial for heresy was Dr. Rowland Williams. His "Bunsen's Biblical Researches" was a vehicle for discussing the major questions on which German Old Testament criticism had reached a fair degree of concensus. So he wrote approvingly of the composite, non-Mosaic origins of the Pentateuch and of an exilic date for Isaiah 40-66 and a post-exilic date for the Book of Daniel. He defended Bunsen's idea that the prophets were less prognosticators of the future than witnesses to the eternal principles of Divine Government. The supernatural in its conventional understanding was discounted along with the whole doctrine of an inerrant Scripture.[25] Each of the essays was in its own way bound to give offense. The controversy that ensued involved not only trials before the Court of Arches but a literary battle of considerable magnitude.[26] If the purpose of Essays and Reviews was to make new ideas widely known it eminently succeeded.

While this issue was burning at full blast, fuel was added to the fire by the Bishop Colenso affair. Colenso, a missionary bishop in South Africa, had undertaken the translation of the Bible into Zulu. According to the Bishop it was his own converts who, while assisting him in the work of translation, first caused him to doubt the

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[24] Jowett's essay, which is still profitably read, has been recently republished in Reardon, op. cit., pp. 312-23.

[25] Rowland Williams, op. cit., footnote 3, supra.

[26] For a summary of the full contents of Essays and Reviews and of the several books and articles written in response see John Hunt, Religious Thought in England in the Nineteenth Century (London: Gibbings & Co., Ltd., 1896), pp. 199-233.

reliability of Pentateuchal history. They questioned the story of Noah gathering all the animals into the ark and wondered at the "injustice" of Mosaic laws on slavery. These simple Africans, observed Colenso, found some of the Old Testament in no way superior to the folk tales and customs they had repudiated for Christianity. Thus Colenso was forced to examine his own belief in these matters. He undertook an investigation of the historical veracity of the Pentateuch, availing himself of the best German Biblical handbooks but relying very much on his own somewhat limited scholarly resources.[27] The result was The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined, the first of its seven slim volumes appearing in 1862. The Bishop announced it to be his considered conclusion, a conclusion, he said, resting neither on speculation nor mere probability, that the narrative of the Pentateuch, "whatever may be its value or meaning, cannot be regarded as historically true. . . ."[28] This was but one of the matters that resulted in

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[27] Colenso provided biographical information in the preface to the first volume of The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined.

[28] Ibid., I, 20. Colenso's forte was in finding mathematical inconsistencies in the narrative. In the first volume he made a great deal out of the fact that Exodus 12:37 says 600,000 men accompanied Moses out of Egypt. The physical difficulties suggested by this figure were numerous. Colenso asked, for instance, how all the Children of Israel could then come into the court of the Tabernacle as the Law required. "But how many would the whole Court have contained? Its area (60 yards by 30 yards) was 1800 square yards, and the area of the Tabernacle itself (18 yards by 6 yards) was 108 square yards. Hence the area of the Court outside the Tabernacle was 1962 square yards. But the 'whole Congregation' would have made a body of people nearly 20 miles--or more accurately, 33,350 yards--long and 18 feet or 6 yards wide; that is to say, packed closely together, they would have covered an area of 201,180 square yards. In fact, the Court, when thronged, could only have held 5000 people; whereas the ablebodied men alone exceeded 600,000." Ibid., I, 34. Compare with Colenso's denial of the historicity of the Pentateuch the statement by the Biblical

the Bishop's trial for heresy. He had early in his career fallen under the influence of F. D. Maurice[29] (who along with Coleridge was an early transmitter of German neo-theology to English soil). Even before writing The Pentateuch . . . Colenso had published a commentary on Romans in which were evident certain Christological heresies he had learned from Maurice. Contrary to common opinion it was this more than his Old Testament criticism that resulted in formal charges of heresy.[30] This is important to note, for Colenso, like the several writers of Essays and Reviews, was a man of heterodox theology quite apart from any adherence to higher critical views. The opponents of critical study could thus take comfort in the belief that these exponents of new thought were enemies of the faith all along the line (a charge not so conveniently leveled at Robertson Smith). But while their critical views might be summarily rejected, they were still being disseminated to the reading public for the first time on a broad scale.

Nor were the minds of natural scientists and renegade bishops the only sources from which disturbing ideas emanated in the 1860's. The fledgling science of anthropology was then making its presence felt as well. The early anthropologists in common with scholars in other fields worked on the hypothesis that there must be a unilinear,

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archaeologist W. F. Albright just one century later: ". . . we now recognize the historicity of the entire Scriptural tradition from the Patriarchs to the end of the New Testament period." History, Archaeology, and Christian Humanism (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), p. 56.

[29] "Maurice is . . . the strongest single factor in the development of the Bishop's ideas." Peter Hinchliff, John William Colenso (London: Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1964), p. 17. One really has to wonder about the role of the Zulus in "converting" Colenso.

[30] Ibid., p. 81.

progressive evolution evident in all human societies.[31] Religion as a part of man's social existence would have to fit into this preconceived pattern as well. Edward Burnett Tylor, whose Researches in the Early History of Mankind appeared in 1865, advanced the idea that religion began with a crude animism as primitive man attempted to explain to himself such phenomena as death, diseases, trances, visions, and dreams by positing the existence of an immaterial soul or anima. By steps men moved on to the idea of spiritual beings, to polytheism and finally monotheism.[32] The incompatibility of such a theory with Biblical anthropology could hardly be greater.

More and more the tenability of traditional concepts of Biblical authority came to be questioned. The historical, genetic, evolutionary method seemed not in accord with the doctrine of an infallible, inerrant Scripture.[33] If Christianity was to survive in the modern world, many said, then her theology would have to undergo a major and drastic overhaul.[34] Thus in England after 1859 the winds of controversy began to blow with ever increasing velocity. The Scots, too,

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[31] John Wyon Burrow, Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

[32] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 24-27.

[33] ". . . the notion of verbal infallibility could not possibly survive the birth of historic inquiry, which showed in Scripture as elsewhere an organic growth, and therefore a necessary period of immature development." F. W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (1885), as quoted in W. Neil, op. cit., p. 269.

[34] Alan Richardson, "The Rise of Modern Biblical Scholarship and Recent Discussion of the Authority of the Bible," The Cambridge History of the Bible, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

toward the middle of the 1860's, began to stir from their dogmatic slumbers. Andrew Bruce Davidson (1831-1902), a professor of Hebrew at the Free Church College in Edinburgh, was one of the elect spirits in Scotland that first sensed the critical nature of the storm that was brewing. In 1865, the year before Robertson Smith entered his classroom, Davidson had written an assessment of the spirit of the age in a letter to a friend in South Africa:

> This country is in what people who use large words call a "transition" state--as if the world, or nature, or man (or God?) could be in any other. Either transition or stagnation and corruption. All life and the universe is in transit, like a dark spot across the luminous orb of the Almighty--only visible and defined against the brightness behind it. But you know big thoughts are simmering in men's brains just now, large, indefinite, hazy conceptions, taking the greatest grasp to open and close upon, uneasiness and discontent with the gains of the past, which will no longer fill but only irritates the soul into which its advocates thrust it,--and as the heedless eddies of the wind carry noxious thistledown but also seeds of the fairest trees and sow indiscriminately on all soils, so at present every heart at all open to the influences of the times finds growing in it a crop of miseries and hopes which its own hand never sowed but the spirit of the age dropped in, which bloweth where it listeth and you cannot tell whence it cometh nor wither it goeth. But this breaking up of old forms of faith and the combinations of the old material into new shapes goes on greatly in secret, unrecognized by the Churches. And so everyone has an inner history which he will not venture to declare; but I dare say not a few could a tale unfold full of "sorrows and aspirations"; and the great difficulty of thinking men is I take it this: Is this spirit of age really the tumultuous many-sided movement of God in history? or is it the Spirit of Antichrist, of whom we have heard that he should come? The Christian Churches here go in unanimously with the latter view; many thoughtful Christian men who venture to speak, pronounce the former. Happy seem to me those who take either side; and only miserable and paralytic those who halt between the two. I own to one of the sick folk waiting at the pool in the vain hope that some angel will trouble the waters; I dislike the old, I distrust the new.[35]

It was to be Davidson's most brilliant pupil, Robertson Smith, who,

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[35]Quoted in James Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), pp. 102-04.

whether angel or no, was destined to trouble the waters by taking the new ideas out of their hiding places in men's hearts and laying them before the Christian folk of Scotland as liberating truths.

The Nature and Origin of the Free Church of Scotland

The Free Church of Scotland in which William Robertson Smith was reared and whose most notable, if infamous, son he was to become was a bastion of Calvinist orthodoxy. This Church had come into existence in 1843 as the result of the greatest of all disruptions in the established, presbyterian, Church of Scotland.[36] The circumstances and consequences of this church schism three years before Smith's birth are of no small importance in understanding his life.

For more than a century two factions in the Church had maintained an uneasy truce.[37] The Moderates, as one party was known, were men who had been deeply influenced by the culture of the Enlightenment, particularly its rationalism and abhorrence of "enthusiasm." These Moderates were not known to deny the great Biblical and Reformation doctrines of sin and salvation. They simply ignored them, preferring to inculcate moral virtue with lessons drawn from secular literature.[38]

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[36] Peter Bayne, The Free Church of Scotland: Her Origin, Founders, and Testimony (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1894); Thomas Brown, Annals of the Disruption (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1893); J. R. Fleming, A History of the Church in Scotland, 1843-1874 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927).

[37] See the chapter "Moderates and Evangelicals" in Donald MacLean, Aspects of Scottish Church History (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927); Andrew Campbell, Two Centuries of the Church in Scotland, 1707-1929 (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, Ltd., 1930), pp. 93-196.

[38] John H. S. Burleigh, A Church History of Scotland (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 304.

The other and more conservative party, popularly called Evangelicals, were outspoken champions of the Westminster Confession, men whose orthodoxy was often warmed by a strain of pietism.[39] In the early nineteenth century the Evangelicals grew in strength until in 1832 they were able to gain control of the General Assembly of the Church. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), the leading spirit and most illustrious light of the Evangelical camp, was elected Moderator.[40]

In the concrete issue that led to a formal rupture in the Church of Scotland it was the Evangelical party that was cast in an innovating role. Against the established practice of granting a patron (who would in most cases be the nobleman whose ancestor had originally endowed a church) the last word in the choice of ministers, the Evangelicals championed the prerogative of the laity of the congregation to veto a patron's nominee.[41] In 1833 the General Assembly under Chalmers' leadership passed an act designed to grant parishoners this power. The ensuing "Ten Year Conflict" was the crisis of the century for the Scots.[42] Moderate opponents of the so-called Veto Act brought the

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[39] Ibid., p. 228.

[40] Chalmers, a convert from Moderatism, was a renowned professor of divinity, a popular preacher, and leader of a movement to alleviate poverty among the masses of Scotland's burgeoning industrial cities. His attachment to the Evangelical cause carried a good deal of influence. See James Hastings, "Chalmers," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. by James Hastings, III (1908), 338-40.

[41] Some scholars see in this the Scottish manifestation of the same drive for an extension of suffrage that led to the Parliamentary electoral reforms of 1832. See Norman L. Walker, Chapters from the History of the Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1895), p. 1f.

[42] See P. Carnegie Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy (2 vols.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), I, 40-77.

question before the civil courts. When the courts upheld the rights of patrons, what most dismayed the Evangelicals was the threat the decision posed to the spiritual independence of the Church. They charged the Moderate backers of this "civil intrusion" with Erastianism.[43] The many issues dividing the Church of Scotland were now reduced to the single question of the respective spheres of ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction. When in 1843 Parliament supported the Court of Session in upholding the rights of patrons, the Evangelical backers of the Veto Act felt they had no choice but to withdraw from the establishment.[44]

The Free Church of Scotland was born of this "Disruption of 43." The men of the Free Church were noted from the beginning for their dedication to principle and their adherence to sound doctrine. The vitality and popularity of the movement was demonstrated by its rapid growth. The 451 ministers who came out from the establishment gave up stipends, church buildings, manses, and schools. In two years time, however, they had found 500 new places of worship; in just twelve years they had established three colleges;[45] in forty years they built 600 parish schools.[46]

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[43]The problem is parallel in this respect with the contemporaneous Oxford Movement in the Church of England.

[44]A telling fact about this Disruption is that all the missionaries of the Church of Scotland, with but one exception, chose the insecurity of withdrawal rather than stay in a Church dominated by Moderates. The Moderates were distinguished by their lack of missionary zeal. Simpson, op. cit., I, 75.

[45]The New College, Edinburgh, founded in 1843, where Smith studied divinity from 1866-1870; the Free Church College, Aberdeen, founded in 1853, where Smith held the Chair of Hebrew from 1870-1881; and the Free Church College, Glasgow, founded in 1855.

[46]Sir Robert Rait and George S. Pryde, Scotland (2d. ed. rev.; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), p. 295.

The Home-life and Early Education of William Robertson Smith

William Pirie Smith (1811-1890) was one of those who cast his lot with the Free Church. At the time of the Disruption he was serving as rector of an important higher school in Aberdeen. He gave up this promising career to accept a call to serve as minister of the Free Church in the united congregations of Keig and Tough. With his young wife and infant daughter Rev. Smith came in 1845 to a poor, rural parish with but a make-shift shed for a church. William Robertson Smith, the second of eight children, was born in the rude manse of Keig on 8 November 1846.[47]

Until he entered the University of Aberdeen at age fifteen, Robertson Smith's education was exclusively in the hands of his father. Rev. Smith was a scholar of rare discipline, devotion, and openness of mind. His example made a deep and lasting impression on the intellect of his precocious son. The pursuit of learning and the pleasures of literature seem to have dominated most of the waking hours of the entire family. Some of the teaching was carried on in a fairly formal fashion for Rev. Smith supplemented his ministerial income by taking into the manse a few boarding students. In the sparsely populated region of Keig these boarding students along with his brothers and sisters were young Smith's only companions and school mates.

William's intellect was allowed to flower at its own rapid pace

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[47] John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal, The Life of William Robertson Smith (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), pp. 8-10. Black and Chrystal have drawn a comprehensive and charming portrait of the Smith household. We attempt in what follows only to draw attention to the intellectual and spiritual qualities of the young Smith.

and the literary tastes and scholarly habits of his parents were acquired naturally. Of his son's early affection for the printed page Rev. Smith wrote:

> He certainly loved books dearly from his earliest years. "Book" was almost the first word he managed to pronounce and as soon as he could read [at the age of three] he devoured all the literature that came his way. He had no special love of fiction. He liked something solid and substantial. Having read the first volume of Miss Chorlesworth's Ministering Children, he pronounced it to be "more childish than childhood itself."[48]

Among the books noted as William's favorites were Macauly's Lays of Ancient Rome, much of which he knew by heart,[49] The Pilgrim's Progress, and the Penny Cyclopedia. For his twelfth birthday he received a prized copy of The Vulgate.[50]

Though he apparently had to relearn the art in later life, we are told that Robertson Smith was beginning to read Hebrew at the age of six. Greek, Latin, and mathematics, however, were the staple subjects for more formal instruction. Of his method of teaching Pirie Smith wrote:

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[48]William Pirie Smith, "Father's Memorandum," Smith MSS, 7476-6. The Smith MSS are located in the Anderson Room, Cambridge University Library. There are seven boxes of material in an unedited, poorly organized condition. The number in the citation is that of the box in which the writer found the specific document in question. The three major kinds of material in the Smith MSS are the memorandums and reminiscences written by Smith's close friends at the request of Black and Chrystal, Smith's correspondence, and Smith's lecture notes.

[49]J. P. Lilley, "William Robertson Smith: Recollections of a Fellow-Student," The Expositor, eighth series, XX (1920), 66.

[50]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 17-19. Alexander Whyte, a leader in Scottish religious life, remembered seeing on his first visit to the Smith household "a boy extended on the study floor, devouring an encyclopedia too bulky to be handled otherwise by its young reader." G. F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1925), p. 208.

> Lessons were regularly prescribed, and then the boys were left on their own resources, and they uniformly did their best, just as well in my absence as when I was present, accomplishing all that could reasonably be expected. I am not sure that this method would answer in every case; but certainly in their case it trained them to habits of self-reliance, drew out their latent powers, accustomed them to think for themselves, and gave them the pleasure that springs from the overcoming of difficulties. . . . No cribs were allowed. There was no such thing in the house, and so it came to pass that a passage from a Latin or Greek author which they had never seen had no special terrors for them, and presented difficulties such as they had already encountered and often surmounted.[51]

A life long penchant for debate and argument seems to have been bred into young Smith's personality by virtue of the household atmosphere. A contemporary has described the Smith home as "a perpetual debating society" in which "parents, brothers, sisters, and boarders--stimulated one another to discuss everything above and beneath the sun, and which adjourned at nightfall only to meet again with new zest and fresh arguments next morning."[52] William was particularly fond of having what he called "rational discussion" with his father. There is no doubt that the seeds of many of Smith's later varied academic pursuits were planted in these hours of conversation in the study of the manse. From an early age, wrote his father, "nothing pleased [William] more than a lively conversation on any topic of interest . . . speaking was to him a real refreshment and it was a medicine to which we often had recourse."[53]

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[51] William Pirie Smith, loc. cit.

[52] James Strahan, op. cit., p. 235. Another writer commenting on this aspect of the Smith household saw in it a source of Robertson Smith's difficulties in later life, for "it never dawned upon him that most of his fellows did not share his passion for debate and that Churchmen were liable to stone any prophet who did not prophesy smooth things." Charles Earl Raven and Stanley Cook, Centenary of the Birth on the 8th November 1846 of the Reverend Professor W. Robertson Smith (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1946), p. 5.

[53] William Pirie Smith, loc. cit. Rev. Smith recorded numerous

Not less important in moulding Smith's personality was the intensely evangelical atmosphere that permeated daily life in the manse. The day was begun and concluded by a service of worship in which all took part. The Bible was an omnipresent object of study and conversation and young "Willie" apparently took an exceptional interest in the Book. Of this his father observed:

> He never, even in his busiest times, not even when examinations were close at hand retired for the night without reading carefully and thoughtfully a portion of Holy Scripture, on which it was plain to see he offered secret prayers, before beginning to read--and in addition committing to memory one or more verses of a Psalm. By this means partly and still more by his mother's Bible lessons, begun as soon as he could take in a lesson of any kind, and continued day by day and not merely on Sundays, his mind became steeped, so to speak, in Bible history and Bible doctrine at an early age. Indeed I have no hesitation in saying I have never known a young man better acquainted, hardly one nearly so well acquainted even with those parts of the Divine Word which are seldom read and almost never mastered.[54]

The family interest in Scripture was, of course, hardly an academic matter.[55] The concern for the eternal salvation of each child's soul was the first object of all this religious nurture. Rev. Smith

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examples of these conversations and of the spiritual insights of his gifted child. Since the "Memorandum" was written after years of controversy in which his son's orthodoxy was on trial, one can but wonder if Rev. Smith was not at special pains to prove the depth of his son's spiritual enlightenment.

[54] Ibid. This somewhat adulatory statement is corroborated by others who knew Smith in his boyhood. One wrote that as a lad Smith "revelled especially in the sublime poetry of Scripture. The Book of Revelation was his favorite. He frankly avowed he did not understand it, but he was captivated by its sublime pictures of the new heaven and new earth, and other sublimities." Anonymous, "A Recollection of W. R. S.," Smith MSS, 7476-6.

[55] On the enormous cultural importance of the Bible in Victorian homes see E. E. Kellet Religion and Life in the Early Victorian Age (London: Epworth Press, 1938), pp. 104-25. Kellet, incidentally, was one of Smith's students.

and his wife prayerfully looked in each child's life for confession of a personal appropriation of the gospel and attendant signs of "a work of grace." William underwent a kind of spiritual crisis in his tenth year. His health had long been poor,[56] and the possibility that he might die was raised by a severe illness in the winter of 1855-56. Rev. Smith described at length conversations he had with his son at this time.

> When he was in his tenth year he was brought face to face with death and we had many serious talks and musings about his spiritual state. For example, having been able one day to be present in Church when I preached on the duty of self-examination, the subject wrought in his mind and in the evening he said to me--first closing the door, lest anyone should hear--Papa, Paul says he was the chief of sinners, now I have a great difficulty about this. Does he use the word "chief" as a superlative meaning very great? or must everyone feel himself to be indeed a greater sinner than any other? I don't do this but I know myself to be a great sinner. Later the same evening, when going to bed, he said to his mother, Mama, did Papa mean that we all, young and old, should examine ourselves? She said, yes. He said, he had tried, but didn't come to the conclusion he was a child of God, but then he remembered the second thing that had been said, to turn to Christ, and he had prayed to God to turn him.[57]

While explaining that it was not his practice to press upon his children or anyone else such questions as, "Have you been converted?" or "Are you a child of God?" Rev. Smith nevertheless records with evident satisfaction that in the course of this time of his son's illness,

> we had the consolation of learning that a work of grace was wrought upon him and in such a form that he was at length delivered from the fear of death and made a partaker of a hope full of immortality. That the change wrought upon him was real, we had many satisfactory evidences--not the less satisfactory that there was no parade of

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[56] "William was a rather delicate child. We were never free from anxiety about his health until he passed the age of twenty-one." William Pirie Smith, loc. cit.

[57] Ibid.

> piety, no sanctimoniousness, but a cheerful performance of daily duty, truthfulness in word and deed, and a conscientiousness which we could not help thinking was sometimes almost morbid.[58]

The relationship of Smith to his father, even in the time of stormy public controversy over higher criticism was ever one of deep respect, confidence, and love. The letters written in the years after William left the family home are ample witness to the unusual bonds between father and son. But if as a boy William was an apt pupil and a delight to his father's heart it is no less true that he early displayed a marked independence of mind. In the more formal work at the manse "Willie" was the wonder of his peers as he displayed his learning in debate with the teacher. One of the boarding students left this recollection:

> On Sunday afternoons the manse dining-room was converted into a household Bible class and something approaching the old catechising took place. Dr. Smith greatly delighted in this, for he was a born teacher. We were asked to take notes of his lecture in church and were expected to give the heads of it in the Bible class. . . . The juniors dreaded the questioning, but the elder brother would readily with the greatest ease give the substance of his father's discourse, and I remember him--to my great surprise--venturing to point out one side of the truth to which the preacher had not had time to refer. This was a quid pro quo, which, remembering the paternal counsel on "partialisms," we rather enjoyed and of which Willie was rather proud. It shocked us, but it evidently pleased Dr. Smith, and the Bible class ended in a colloquy in which these two interlocutors had it all to themselves.[59]

Linguistics and religion were by no means the only subjects in Rev. Smith's curriculum. Mathematics and science held a large place in the interests of this extraordinary father and educator. The soundness of the mathematical training William received is evident from his later

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Quoted in Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 22.

fame as a scholar in this department.[60] Physical science, if less formally taught at the manse, was nevertheless learned. There were frequent hikes under the supervision of Rev. Smith on the rocky hills and in the green valleys around Keig. Speaking of these popular excursions one of the boarding students related how,

> Dr. Smith would stop at a point on the hill where the huge rocks abutted on the path, and would give us a very graphic description of rock formation, and of the chemical action of percolating water on the stone. We were shown how the Aberdeen granite was clearly of igneous origin, and how big Bennachie across the Don had been consolidated in the cooling of the earth's crust and then shot upwards into its long camel's back and various "taps"--which had become more sharply defined by subsequent denudation. . . . We could scarcely believe all that was said, and hardly knew we were learning modern science, so pleasantly and jocularly was much of it done.[61]

Evidence of young Smith's interest in the scientific lore imparted by his father is afforded by a letter he wrote to a boyhood pal. After calling his friend's attention to a new book on bird eggs, notifying him that he was forwarding a dead bat he had found, and offering various speculations on why the squirrel population in their area was on the increase, he proudly recorded that, "Last night, at one time, in one plot of our garden, I counted the following species at least--Sparrow, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Tomtit, Yellow-hammer, Wren, and I think two others whose names I do not remember."[62]

Boyhood chums have remarked how William was prone to speculate about the larger meaning of the scientific facts which his father so artfully taught. One noted that William was particularly fond of the

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[60] See Chapter II, infra.

[61] Quoted in Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

[62] Letter to Archibald McDonald, 20 February 1863, Smith MSS, 7476-6.

Heraclitian formula "all things are in flux" and how he could endlessly apply this notion to the cycles of nature.[63] Another wrote that as a boy William was not only an "acquisitive scholar" but "a great theorizer" capable of such things as "boyish but most interesting notions about the function of imagination in medieval and occult science."[64]

At the University of Aberdeen, 1861-65

When he competed in the University of Aberdeen bursary competition William had his first opportunity to pit his mettle against boys who had had the benefit of a preparatory school education. The winner of such an award received a substantial monetary grant. The competition, therefore, was intense and the honor of winning very great. In 1861 William and his younger brother, George, at ages fourteen and thirteen respectively, were among the youngest of two hundred boys who entered these "Scottish Olympics." The competitors had to demonstrate their prowess in translating from Greek and Latin authors and in doing mathematical exercises. The thoroughness of Rev. Smith's teaching and the brilliance of his two eldest sons was certified beyond doubt when William won the first prize and George one of the lesser awards. An unsuccessful contestant, who first made William's acquaintance at that time, has recalled the announcing of the news of the victors to the scholars gathered in the quadrangle of the college. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts appeared at a window and said that a William Robertson Smith of Keig had won the first award.

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[63] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 18.

[64] W. A. Gray, "A Reminiscence of W. Robertson Smith," Smith MSS, 7476-6.

> As the name was not known amongst the champions of the Aberdeen Grammar School of the Gymnasium or any of the larger provincial academies, many of the taller lads looked around to see if they could discern any face beaming with delight over the announcement. I myself had no difficulty in distinguishing the fortunate scholar; for just at my side there was one who seemed to be only a small boy, wearing a gray Inverness cape and a Scotch bonnet, and, as soon as the name was intimated, he swung his glengarry over his head and cried out in ecstasy: "Hurrah! I'm First Bursar."[65]

This was but the first in a long string of academic honors to mark the career of W. Robertson Smith.

Just after William's fifteenth birthday he and George, under the supervision of their older sister, moved to Aberdeen and took up quarters near the University.[66] In 1860, the year before the Smith brothers matriculated, the faculties of King's and Marischal Colleges, which had been rivals for four centuries, were fused into a single institution, henceforth the United University of Aberdeen.[67] Due to this stimulus Aberdeen was at the time enjoying something of a renaissance and scholars were flocking there in great numbers.

The program for the arts degree was an amalgamation of the medieval curriculum and the newer emphasis on physical science which had been winning its way since the time of the Scottish Enlightenment. In their first year at the University students took courses in rhetoric and the classical languages. In the second year language study continued and work in mathematics and physical science (natural philosophy) was begun. The third year was devoted to continuing work in science

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[65] J. P. Lilley, op. cit., p. 65.

[66] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 32.

[67] W. Douglas Simpson, The Fusion of 1860: A Record of the Centenary Celebrations and a History of the University of Aberdeen, 1860-1960 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963).

(including dynamics, optics, electricity, and astronomy) along with a course in logic and psychology. In the last year the students were introduced to moral philosophy.[68]

The most celebrated teachers under whom Smith studied were Sir William Duguid Geddes, professor of the classics, and Dr. Alexander Bain, who taught rhetoric, logic, and psychology. In Geddes' courses where the standard fare was such as Thucydides, Homer, Horace, Juvenal, and Virgil, William and George soon distinguished themselves with their linguistic ability, William being adjudged the best "Grecian" in the class.[69] Professor Geddes, an old friend of Rev. Smith's Aberdeen days, was much impressed with these products of the Reverend's tutelage. Speaking of William, Geddes once wrote to Rev. Smith that,

> He early attracted my attention not only by the assiduity and earnestness with which he applied himself to his studies, but also by the manifest ease with which he could overleap difficulties; and I remember with pleasure how he and his . . . brother were greeted on more than one occasion by the applause of the class on a felicitous reply--an evidence of the esteem as well as admiration in which they were held by their compeers.[70]

Alexander Bain, author of The Senses and The Intellect (1855) and a friend and philosophical ally of John Stuart Mill, was the most renowned scholar attached to the University. In the year of "the fusion," Bain was appointed to the Chair of Rhetoric and Logic. By many Scots, particularly Free Churchmen, he was considered to be a very dangerous, if not atheistical, thinker. Working within the anti-metaphysical tradition of Locke, Hume, and James Mill, Bain had come to

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[68] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 34. Lilley, op. cit., p. 68.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Quoted in William Pirie Smith, op. cit.

the conclusion that physiology determines psychology, that is that mental operations are subordinate to material conditions. He was thus an early exponent of the associationist or behaviorist view of human nature.[71] Though he spent two years under his instruction there is no doubt that Robertson Smith found Bain's philosophy most uncongenial.[72] In an early polemical essay Smith sought to show that Bain's principle of the priority of the physiological was not necessary to explain such an elemental matter as the psychological origins of the idea of space.[73] Against Bain's argument that the awareness of extension required a succession of muscular feelings, Smith sought to prove that two tactual or visual sensations of the same kind experienced simultaneously can occasion the idea of space. No induction based on a feeling of muscular motion is required. Later some of Smith's first published essays were directed against the epistemology of Bain and Mill as it related to mathematical reasoning.[74] In his subsequent theological work, Smith saw a parallel to Bain's school of psychology in religious theories, such as those of Abraham Kuenen, that made ecstatic dancing and physiological aberration the basis of prophetic revelations.[75] Against such materialistic notions Smith often and consistently raised his standard.[76]

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[71] Edith S. Hooper, "Alexander Bain," Dictionary of National Biography, Second Supplement, I, 79-81.

[72] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 34-35. Lilley, op. cit., p. 67.

[73] "On the Psychological Origin of the Idea of Space." A rough draft will be found in the Smith MSS.

[74] Chapter II, infra. [75] Chapter III, infra.

[76] It is remarkable that Jesse Hunchberger Brown, "The Contribution of William Robertson Smith to Old Testament Scholarship with

Smith's mathematical and scientific talents were early recognized at the University. No more eloquent proof of his learning in this regard could be offered than that as a senior he won the Furguson Award for Mathematics in an open competition with students of all the northern universities. It was a source of some disappointment to his teachers, notably to the natural philosopher David Thompson and the mathematician Frederick Fuller, that Smith stuck by his youthful resolve to enter the ministry, or, as Fuller styled it, his determination to seek "ecclesiastical preferment."[77]

For most students at that time the pursuit of a university education involved a good deal of poverty and physical hardship. Lodgings were bare and without adequate heat and light. Food was often meagre and undernourishment a serious problem.[78] In his letters home Smith mentions frequent bouts with illness and notes the death of more than one friend. Among those who failed to survive the rigors of this unhealthful, demanding life were William's brother George and their sister Mary Jane.[79] Mary Jane died in 1864; George, two years later

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Special Emphasis on Higher Criticism," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Department of Religion, Duke University, 1964) accords to Bain a positive and prominent role in the formation of Smith's religious ideas. If any one philosopher can be said to have influenced Smith's thinking on religion it is Immanuel Kant. (See Chapter II, infra.) Kant propounded an epistemology profoundly at variance with Bain's. Brown's statement (p. 104) that in his study of the Old Testament and of primitive religions Smith confirmed Bain's linking of man's psychological and physiological characteristics could not be further from the truth.

[77]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 45, 58.

[78]Bain once predicted that of his three most able students, among whom he included Smith, none would live to see fifty. He proved to be right. W. Douglas Simpson, op. cit., pp. 140-41.

[79]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 53-54, 61-62.

after a long illness. Both apparently succumbed to the same tuberculosis which later brought Robertson Smith's life to a premature end. William's health, too, broke near the end of his last year of studies at Aberdeen and he had to return to Keig without taking his examinations. He was awarded the M.A. only after examiners visited him in his own bedroom. Because he could not compete with his classmates many prizes which might have been his were forfeited. In view of his poor health it was decided William should delay a year in entering on his divinity studies. We read however that at this time he began to learn German and Hebrew and pursued a systematic course of reading in theology, favoring particularly the works of Calvin and Augustine.[80]

Smith was no longer, if ever he had been, an imitative learner. He now possessed the linguistic equipment and the liberal background which made it possible for him to proceed with his studies independently. At the age of twenty he was about to embark on a course of scholarly labor and speculation that would carry him far beyond the fields normally traversed by a young man who aspired to serve in the ministry of the Free Church of Scotland.

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[80]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 60.

CHAPTER II

SMITH'S THEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT, 1866-70

From 1866 to 1870 Smith was enrolled as a theological student at New College, Edinburgh. The New College had been founded in 1843 by the Disruption Fathers to be a citadel for the defense of the faith against all heresy and infidelity and as a training ground for Free Church ministers.[1] There is no evidence to suggest that in his twentieth year when he first moved to Edinburgh Robertson Smith harbored any doubts about the truth of the doctrines he could expect to hear propounded at New College. Indeed, he has been described by friends as having "entered on his formal studies for the ministry with a spiritual horizon clear of the slightest cloud." He occupied what at the time were considered "the extreme positions of Presbyterian orthodoxy," and was "eager to be enrolled among the defenders of a system of knowledge and belief in which he had the fullest confidence."[2] It is a matter of

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[1] Burleigh, op. cit., pp. 357-58.

[2] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 69-70. Recalling his days together with Smith as a student Rev. B. Bell wrote in his unpublished "Reminiscence of William Robertson Smith," Smith MSS, 7476-6, that "Smith held then, as always, the Evangelical faith. He was distinctly conservative in his student days." It is also true that from the beginning of his divinity studies Smith was markedly critical of his mentors, if not for their theology at least for the deficiencies in their scholarship. The following excerpts from letters to his father illustrate this tendency. On 19 February 1866 Smith wrote "Professor Duns is portentously stupid--as to this there are no two opinions--his popular

much interest, then, to discover the sources of those unconventional ideas which this once so orthodox student held after his four years of very rapid intellectual development in an institution that prided itself on the purity of its doctrine.

The Orthodox Climate at New College, Edinburgh

The regnant theology was nowhere more clearly defined than in the thought of Dr. James Bannerman under whom Smith studied apologetics. Though he later repudiated Bannerman's thought, we have Smith's father's word that "to the work of Dr. Bannerman's class William gave himself with zest and enthusiasm."[3] Falling under the spell of Bannerman's crusade against all forms of modernism, Smith wrote a paper during his first year at Edinburgh on the topic of Herbert Spencer's theory of development. Summarizing his idea in a letter to his father, Smith wrote:

> In Spencer's book the fallacies are very obvious. The manner in which Spencer contrives really to assume the materiality of the soul, in particular (which, of course, is the foundation of the whole doctrine) is very ingenious, but contains one egregious

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lectures on Thursdays are unintentionally quite comic." On 25 January 1868 he wrote, "My essay stood first on Buchanan's list on Thursday in a curious way. His lectures on the Creation were very ridiculous in their treatment of the various philosophical theories on the question, especially as to Spinoza whom he cariacatured.

"As an experiment, as the last paper was almost wholly on this subject I put in some Berkleyanism, a correct account of Spinoza with a Latin quotation that I happened to remember from the 'Ethica,' and as he had jumbled up Plato and the Manicheans put down some very commonplace observations to show that Plato was not a dualist. To my surprise Buchanan, quite unconscious that I was contradicting what he said, was highly satisfied." Smith MSS, 7449-5. A fellow student has recorded that Smith's interest was weak and his attendance lax in Professor Rainy's course in Church History and Professor MacGreggor's course in Systematic Theology. J. P. Lilley, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

[3]William Pirie Smith, loc. cit.

> petitio principii. Of course the correlation of physical forces forms a great feature of the argument. I think, however, that I can show that the doctrine is not understood by the development school, and that the doctrine of the dissipation of energy directly disproves the theory of evolution.[4]

Still at work on the subject five weeks later, he wrote: "Spencer's book seems to me pretty much to sum up all infidelity, or at least professedly Christian infidelity."[5] Dr. Bannerman was highly pleased with his student's performance. Smith relayed to his father Bannerman's words to the effect that the paper "was to be viewed as quite beyond a mere college exercise, . . ." and that the writer "had mastered it and not it him."[6]

Since it was the doctrine of revelation as defended by Bannerman against which Smith raised his standard,[7] we must take a

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[4] Ibid. Quoted from a letter of 14 December 1866.

[5] Ibid. Quoted from a letter to William Pirie Smith dated 23 January 1867. If in later years Smith argued for an evolutionary view of history and society, he never overcame his aversion to Herbert Spencer. While traveling in Arabia in 1879 Smith chances to meet Spencer. Of this he wrote to a friend: "We have had Herbert Spencer out at Cairo--such a bore. I dined with him one night and saw him a good deal on one or two other occasions. He is very commonplace, has no humour and an absolute want of taste." Letter to Irvine Smith, 18 December 1879 (Suez), Smith MSS, 7449-2.

[6] William Pirie Smith, loc. cit. Quoted from a letter dated 5 March 1867.

[7] Insofar as he ever mentioned by name contemporary spokesmen for the doctrine of revelation against which he contended, Smith singled out Bannerman and also Charles Hodge. Hodge was an American Presbyterian and leader of the so-called Princeton School of theology. On Hodge and his doctrine of Scripture see Ernest R. Sandeen, "The Princeton Theology," Church History, XXXI (1962), pp. 307-21. Writing in 1870 to a friend about the difficulties in the orthodox formulations of the doctrine of inspiration, Smith said: "I glanced over the standard authority, Hodge (!), a few days ago. He has no conception of the modern form of the problem and proves nothing. I fear it is so with all our orthodox men." Letter to John Sutherland Black, 4 September 1870, Smith MSS, 7449-2.

close look at what was being taught. Bannerman's magnum opus under the title Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of Scripture was published in 1865. Inasmuch as the following year Smith came to New College there can be little doubt but that the book contains the material and viewpoint to which he was exposed. Bannerman's was a classic statement of the view of Scripture that prevailed in Scotland at the time. Until as late as 1875 (the year of Smith's Encyclopedia Britannica article "Bible"), says one authority, "Ideas of a static Revelation and a verbally inspired Bible held the field almost without question."[8] As though preparing, however, for the siege that lay ahead Bannerman set forth in extenso and without a shadow of compromise the doctrine of an infallible Bible.

Bannerman was concerned to refute the two fallibilist views of Scripture that he saw lurking on the horizon. As he defined these, one taught "a supernatural inspiration limited as to its degree and its place throughout different portions of Scripture," and the other an "inspiration, not supernatural, but due to the ordinary or the gracious influences of the Spirit common to all, or at least to Christian men, and elevating their rational or religious nature throughout the whole authorship of Scripture."[9] Claiming the Bible's self-interpretation as his authority, Bannerman maintained that revelation and inspiration were correlates and equally supernatural. He defined revelation as "the presentation of objective truth to a man in a supernatural manner

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[8]J. R. Fleming, A History of the Church in Scotland 1875-1929 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1933), p. 16.

[9]James Bannerman, Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of Scripture (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1865), p. 146.

by God."[10] Inspiration was said to be "a statement, in speech or writing, made with infallible accuracy, through the operation of the Spirit, of objective truth revealed to man to be so stated."[11] It followed that the record of revelation and not the revelatory event was the ultimate authority. This was true since:

> The same supernatural power which guarded the revelation, in the act of being made to the prophet, from all incompleteness and mistake, also presided over the act by which he recorded it in the Bible; so that the result of this second step in the process, no less the first, was miraculously guarded from error, and the product was a record marked by infallible truth and divine authority.[12]

The cardinal issue, then, for Bannerman, was the plenary and verbal inspiration and authority of Scripture. Any other view, he said, foundered on the problem of dividing truth from falsehood in Scripture.

> There is no principle embosomed in the theory of a supernatural revelation recorded by a merely natural instrumentality which distinctly declares, or indeed declares at all, what amount of truth is to be set to the credit of the divine communication and what amount to the discredit of human error.[13]

From this standpoint any project of higher criticism was unlawful. There was simply no higher court to which to appeal in criticizing the content of the Bible. No legitimate ground was afforded on which to formulate objections based on supposed historical inaccuracies, apparent contradictions in the text, or on the difficulty and mystery of revealed truths. All such objections were "drawn from a province in which it is not competent for man to enter as a judge and still less as an objector."[14] Not only was criticism of the inspired record beyond the ken of man but even in its interpretation Scripture was not to be

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[10] Ibid., p. 158. [11] Ibid., p. 218. [12] Ibid., p. 98.

[13] Ibid., p. 102. [14] Ibid.

treated by common canons. The inspiration of the writers "bestowed on them an exemption from error, and a plenitude of divine truth which, except by the supernatural gift of God, they could not have possessed, so that in this respect their writings are not like those of other men, and must be viewed and read and interpreted differently."[15] Bannerman thus denied the cardinal tenet of the higher criticism: that Scripture is to be analyzed by the same methods as any other ancient literature.

Such was the prevailing doctrine of Scripture in the Church circles in which Smith was trained. It may be, however, that the very uncompromising rigor with which Bannerman stated his position was a result of an awareness that a growing number of sincere Christians were no longer persuaded of the tenability of such formulations.

One such restive mind was that of Bannerman's colleague on the New College faculty, Andrew Bruce Davidson. Writing in 1865 to a friend, Davidson noted significantly that so far Bannerman's new book "seems to have called forth no opposition and no assent," but for his own part Davidson did not find its central thesis above dispute. "I need not say," he wrote, "that the learned doctor keeps up a holy war with 'proud human reason,' which is hell-born, and imposes eternal silence, except to concur, on its stubborn voice--though why its concurrence should be so eagerly sought when its lead is so vigorously denounced I cannot see."[16]

There is general agreement that it was through Davidson that

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[15] Ibid., pp. 564-65.

[16] Quoted from a letter to William Cormach, 5 July 1865, in James Strahan, op. cit., p. 105.

Smith was first exposed to the higher critical view of Scripture.[17] As one unsympathetic writer put it, "Davidson's teaching, . . . became the source of an alien infusion in Old Testament studies in Scotland. Robertson Smith caught the infection and spread the plague."[18] But Davidson's posture in the years that Smith sat in his classes and even later was ever one of considerable caution and circumspection.[19] It was only after his pupil had fought the battle for higher criticism that Davidson ventured to publish any extensive critical studies of his own. Where Davidson in the eighteen sixties stood in opposition to Bannerman and more traditional Scottish theology was in his view of the place of Scripture in relation to theology.

> He was in radical opposition to the fashionable and almost universal assumption in Scotland that Systematic Theology came first, while the Scriptures were thereafter searched for suitable proof texts . . . so interpreted as to adorn the Dogmatic Scheme.[20]

Davidson believed that the process of ascertaining the true contextual meaning of a Biblical passage, however inconvenient for theology this meaning might be, must precede the building of a system of dogmatics. Thus as early as 1862 in the preface to his first published work, A Commentary on the Book of Job, Davidson asserted the priority of the

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[17]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 78. Willis Glover, Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1954), p. 112.

[18]John Macleod, Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation (Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943), p. 288.

[19]Thomas Kelly Cheyne, Founders of Old Testament Criticism (London: Methuen & Co., 1893), pp. 226-27.

[20]Archibald C. Kennedy, "William Robertson Smith, 1846-94," Fathers of the Kirk: Some Leaders of the Church in Scotland from the Reformation to the Reunion, ed. Ronald Selby Wright (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 242.

grammatical and historical understanding. "We in this country," he wrote, "have been not unaccustomed to begin at the other end, creating exegesis and grammar by deduction from Dogmatics. . . ." Furthermore, "there has been too much tendency to dissever Revelation from any relation to the human mind in its origin, and to the men of its immediate application." Thus Scripture is viewed "as coming from heaven like a meteoric stone, amazing to spectators but to be analyzed and used by a subsequent era." His own approach was to determine the historical and therefore human situation in which Scripture was written. Davidson concluded that "the books of Scripture so far as interpretation and general formal criticism are concerned must be handled very much as other books are handled."[21] It is little wonder that Professor Davidson was unimpressed with his friend Bannerman's interdict on the critical study of Scripture.

No doubt it was this same general viewpoint which Smith heard expounded in Davidson's lectures at Edinburgh. Certain it is that Professor Davidson was Smith's favorite and most influential teacher.[22] As a fellow-student put it, Davidson had "opened up . . . for Smith

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[21]Andrew Bruce Davidson, A Commentary on the Book of Job (London: Williams and Norgate, 1862). George Adam Smith called the book "the first really scientific commentary on the Old Testament in the English language." Quoted by A. Taylor Innes in his biographical introduction to a collection of Davidson's writings entitled The Called of God, ed. J. A. Paterson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), pp. 23-24. J. R. Fleming, A History of the Church in Scotland, 1843-74 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), p. 162, hailed it as "an indication . . . of a dawning era in sound Biblical criticism." As far as publication is concerned Davidson's early promise did not materialize. His major work was published posthumously. His important influence was to be felt in the classroom.

[22]William Pirie Smith, loc cit.

lines of thought and study he eagerly followed."[23] The admiration of pupil for teacher was reciprocated. A friend of Davidson's recalled him once saying of Smith that:

> He had a little fellow in his class far ahead of any other student he ever had in any of his classes. He stated questions of his own and he investigated them for himself in a way no other young man could have done.[24]

Smith's Growing Attachment to Kantian Philosophy and Vermittlungstheologie

In April of 1867 following his first year at New College, Edinburgh, Smith went to Germany to spend the summer months studying theology at the University in Bonn. It was out of fear of "exposing himself to the most rationalistic teaching in Germany" that he had chosen Bonn over the more illustrious Tübingen or Heidelberg faculties.[25] But despite his precaution his intellectual contacts in Germany were to

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[23]Rev. B. Bell, loc. cit. Another fellow student has written as follows: "After studying the Old Testament under A. B. Davidson, we all felt that the old method of buttressing Christian doctrines by texts adduced without due reference to their grammatico-historical meaning and connexion was no longer admissible. . . . Smith came to regard Dogmatic of the old stamp as nothing but caviare." J. P. Lilley, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

[24]James Duguid quoted in Strahan, op. cit., pp. 239-40.

[25]Quoted by Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 85. That Smith was still a young man of very pronounced scrupulosity in matters religious was evident from his letters from Bonn. For instance he wrote home for counsel on such matters as how to deal with an invitation from a fellow student to take a walk on a Sabbath afternoon. "A little before seven a German student called and asked me to walk with him. I walked down to the Scottish Church with him, and had some talk about our ways of keeping the Sabbath which he admitted had advantages. I am not quite sure how I ought to do in such cases. In this instance my course was clear as I had to go to church at any rate; but ought I in other cases to refuse to walk and try to use such conversation as is suitable for sabbath? I incline to the latter view but would rather have your opinion. . . . I would also prefer that you should not send letters so as to reach me on Sabbath as the last did." Ibid., p. 86.

open his eyes to new vistas.[26] It was after his return from Germany that the first clear indications of a tendency to deviate from the prevailing canons of orthodoxy became evident.

At the University of Bonn Smith attended the lectures of Kamphausen, Kohler, and Lange. Through them he was introduced to what was then called the Vermittlungstheologie, a school which was attempting to find an intermediate position between liberalism and orthodoxy.[27] The leading light of this group and a man who had a subsequent decisive influence on Smith was Richard Rothe. In his Zur Dogmatic Rothe defined the mediating posture as follows:

> The matters I handle in this volume inevitably place me in a most unfavorable position. . . . I find myself in direct conflict with both the leading parties in the theology of the present day. My mode of regarding Holy Scripture runs counter to modern orthodoxy. My supernaturalism and firm belief in Revelation are no less opposed to theological liberalism. This very antagonism encourages me to hope that I may be found to have spoken a word in season. On the one hand it is my belief that the consciousness of the age will never thoroughly reassimilate Christianity till it can take courage to believe again in miracle and supernatural influence. I am no less firmly convinced on the other hand, that miracle and supernatural influence will never find their way into the conscious belief of Christians in the form in which Church theology has allowed those ideas to be inoculated into it. That which is past can never be called to life, after history has once buried it. But there are not a few persons who long for the reconciliation of the old and new.[28]

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[26] Smith's friend Thomas K. Cheyne, who he first met on this German tour, wrote that "it was certainly a turning point in Smith's life as a student and thinker." See his review of Black and Chrystal's Life of William Robertson Smith in The Christian Commonwealth (1912), p. 579.

[27] For a discussion of the leading principles and men of this school see Frederic Auguste Lichtenberger, History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century, trans. W. Hastie (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), pp. 476ff.

[28] Richard Rothe, Zur Dogmatic (Gotha: Perthes, 1863), p. iv., as quoted in a review of his book in the Westminster Review, LXXX (1863), p. 104. Rothe's relation to the Vermittlungstheologie is treated by

It was to this problem of reconciling the old and the new that Smith was to devote his talents. He first heard the problem broached in a positive manner in those Bonn lectures of 1867. Writing to his father of Kamphausen's lectures he said:

> I found him rationalistic, as we should say, that is, he holds for example that a passage of SS can contain no more for us than for the author, and that its full meaning is to be obtained by placing ourselves in the author's standpoint. At the same time, though his view leads him to admit there may be historical errors in the Bible, and to refer Daniel to the period of the Maccabees, etc., he is not a rationalist according to the Germans, who reserve that name for those who deny supernatural inspiration and prophecy altogether. . . . Certainly the language in which he spoke of the Messianic Psalms today seemed very orthodox. . . . I do not follow his lectures well enough to speak with certainty.[29]

As the summer progressed Smith's grasp of the language deepened as did his feeling of respect for the Vermittlungstheologie. Writing to his father on July 10 he told of a conversation with Professor Kamphausen on the question of inspiration. While noting that Kamphausen was "very far from orthodox" he added:

> He is a very sincere and pious man; in fact it is quite absurd to regard the heterodox Germans as infidels. Of course I do not mean that such men as Strauss are not infidels. But Kamphausen, though on some points quite heterodox (e.g., he goes about as far as Colenso in the Pentateuch question), is on other points, I may say, strictly orthodox. So far as I can see, he holds quite orthodox views on the person, miracles, etc., of Christ, and lays special weight on the testimonium Spiritus Sancti.[30]

Returning to Edinburgh for the winter term Smith embarked on an intensive study of German theological, philosophical, and Biblical literature. To his father he wrote:

William König, Richard Rothe Sein Charakter, Leben, and Denken (Berlin: Schmetschte und Sohn, 1898).

[29]Quoted by Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

[30]Ibid., p. 88.

> I am going in wholly for German books, chiefly exegetical, Delitzsch on Isaiah, Keils on the Minor Prophets, Rothe's Zur Dogmatic, Hupfeld's die Quellen der Genesis, Ewald's Grammar, and for the rest probably Kamphausen's part of Bunsen's Bibelwerk. . . .[31]

This reading would equip him for the task of mediating to the British people the revolutionary findings of the continental Biblical critics. No less revolutionary was the doctrine of revelation by which Smith was to legitimize the critical method. He brought back from Germany the conviction that one could confidently assert the reality of a supernatural revelation in history while denying that the records through which knowledge of the history is conveyed were themselves supernatural or infallible.

Also during his German sojourn Smith had begun the study of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). He continued his reading of Kant in the winter of 1867-68.[32] Kant's shadow falls over all modern thought and not least in the theological tradition running from Schleiermacher through Rothe to Ritschl, the tradition with which Smith aligned himself.[33] In his Critique of Pure Reason (1781), Kant pointed out that the human mind can no longer be understood as a mirror which

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[31]Letter dated 24 March 1868 (Edinburgh), Smith MSS, 7449-5.

[32]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 90, 94.

[33]On the place of Kant in modern theology see H. R. Mackintosh, op. cit., pp. 26ff; Jacques de Senarclens, Heirs of the Reformation, trans. by G. W. Bromily (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1963), pp. 53-69; Paul Tillich, Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 64-70. Though Smith was much influenced by the Kantian epistemology, he was by no means an uncritical devotee of the whole Kantian philosophy. For example, he told his father of writing a paper "On the Doctrine of Radical Evil in Kant." A few days later the professor said to him, "I don't think you've brought much light out of that smoke of Kant's. I don't think there is any light in it." "I quite agreed with him," said Smith, "in fact my object was to show that Kant's deistical view is quite confused and contradictory." Letter dated 18 December 1868 (Edinburgh), Smith MSS, 7449-5.

passively reflects the patterns, the logos of things-in-themselves (i.e., the ultimate realities which Kant called noumena). The theory running back to the Greeks that the objects of experience are given independently of thought was rendered untenable by Kant's "Copernican Revolution." The mind, he said, was an active agency which ordered the raw material of sense experience under the categories and spatial-temporal forms peculiar to the human understanding. And though the categories may be a priori as Kant held, nonetheless all knowledge is conditioned by the knower. The epistemological basis of any knowledge of God based on traditional metaphysics was destroyed since the reason is trapped in the phenomenal world of its own "making." For Kant "God" became a postulate necessary for the enforcement of morality. For many of Kant's disciples (including Smith) the religious consequence of his philosophy was a stress on revelation as existential encounter (as opposed to the natural revelation which Kant had undercut) and on faith as the response required in encounter even though reason's hold on the object of faith had slipped. Along with his German theological mentors Smith thought he had found a viable foundation for a post-Kantian theology in the historical stream of religious experience. That this was the direction of Smith's thought is clear from the extant essays written while he was yet a student at New College.

In the last weeks of 1867 Smith was busy writing an essay entitled "On Prophecy and History."[34] His purpose as he stated it for

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[34]A fragment of this essay under the title "Prophecy and Personality" will be found in Lectures and Essays of William Robertson Smith, eds. John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), pp. 97-108. This work as a whole is hereafter cited as Lectures and Essays.

his father was to discern how "the prophet's mind, acting according to its natural laws, was yet the organ of a supernatural revelation."[35] Though Smith had some reservations about the intelligibility of what he had written, he reported that the essay was warmly praised by Davidson who predicted his student would "on the human side of the science do good service to theology."[36] Despite some complaint that it was "somewhat German and obscure" the essay was "very favorably received" by the New College Theological Society before whom it was read on 25 January 1868.[37]

Since only a fragment survives we cannot reconstruct the entire argument of the essay, but what is of interest is the way in which Smith employed his recent Kantian studies to probe into the nature of prophetism. The prophet, said Smith, was not a passive instrument, "not a mere lyre struck by the plectrum of the Spirit." Nor would it do to say simply that the revelation had to be "intelligently apprehended" by the prophet before it could be given forth. There must be a recognition of the total operation of the prophet's mind on that which he apprehends.

> For whatever difference of view exists as to the objective per se (Noumenon or Ding-an-sich), there is no difference of opinion among competent psychologists as to the fact that what appears to us as objective is really a product of personal activity acting on certain subjective elements, that the objective is never apprehended except through the subjective. If, for example a picture stands before me, I do not perceive the colour, figure etc., as noumenon, I receive from the picture only a series of subjective impressions which an exercise of my own personality builds up into the picture I really see.[38]

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[35] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 96.

[36] Ibid., p. 97.

[37] Ibid., p. 100.

[38] Lectures and Essays, p. 98.

Smith was saying that though there be an objective, indeed supernatural vision vouchsafed to the prophet nevertheless the prophecy itself was always a human and therefore a subjectively conditioned utterance.

> If nothing can be apprehended as objective in the first instance, since the vision must somehow be broken down into subjective feelings and built up again by the person affected before he can apprehend it,--this being so, it is clear that no absolute security can be given that the prophet will not add elements of his own. . . . No complete freedom of admixture would be possible unless all the prophet's previous recollections were for the time cancelled, i.e., unless he lost his self-consciousness, which we know he never did.[39]

This was not meant to be a denial of the prophet's authority or of the supernatural origin of his message. It simply meant, said Smith, that "since the prophetic consciousness was continuous with the ordinary consciousness a supernatural revelation was not independent of the previous thoughts of the prophet but only supplemented these thoughts so as to bring forth a new and perfect revelation."[40]

Of greater importance in tracing the evolution of Smith's thought was the paper entitled "Christianity and the Supernatural."[41] It revealed the elemental shift in his stance since his contacts with the Vermittlungstheologie. In a letter to his family Smith described the paper as "very much a rendering of Rothe's ideas from an English starting point and in English forms of thought."[42] This paper is of interest, too, because it brought on Smith's first public confrontation with his more conservative brethren.[43]

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[39] Ibid., p. 99.

[40] Ibid., p. 100.

[41] Lectures and Essays, pp. 109-36.

[42] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 103.

[43] Ibid.

The essay was a frontal assault on the reigning school of apologetics and a frank denial of the doctrine of an infallible Bible. Coupled with this attack was a constructive attempt to place the Faith on what seemed to Smith a more certain foundation. The need of the hour, he said, was to "reconsider the whole treatment of the premises of Christianity." It would no longer do to defend Christianity as an hypothesis having a high degree of probability because it suits certain facts better than any alternative. For then one felt bound to accept the truth of Christianity only until further facts turn up pro or con. Such a hypothetical Christianity, said Smith, was not worth having because "the essence of personal Christianity lies in love of a personal Saviour"; faith between persons must rest on "something deeper than a mere balancing of probabilities." It was on the ground of an unshakable personal element that Christianity must be defended and not on "mere phenomenal probabilities."[44]

One result of this stress on the personal quality of revelation was the rendering of a sharp distinction between revelation and the Bible. Orthodox theologians had frequently confused the two or used them interchangeably. Against this view Smith asserted, "the Bible is

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[44] Lectures and Essays, pp. 109-13. Though Smith was surely unaware of the thought of Soren Kierkegaard, it is noteworthy that the "melancholy Dane" had but a few years earlier raised a like protest which, though falling on deaf ears at the time, was to reverberate through twentieth century theology. Kierkegaard turned the full weight of his irony on the Christian who "clings to probabilities." "The wader," he wrote, "feels his way with his foot, lest he get beyond his depth; and so the shrewd and prudent man feels his way with the understanding in the realm of the probable, and finds god where the probabilities are favorable, and gives thanks on the great holidays of probability." Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. by David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 208.

not revelation but the record of divine revelation--the record of those historical facts in which God has revealed Himself to man."[45] It followed, said Smith, that Christianity does not consist of faith in an inspired book or in revealed propositions but in the knowledge of a revealed Person.

> That God really . . . has revealed himself to man--not that we possess an inspired record of this revelation--is the point on which Christianity stands or falls. Of course, on this view we can no longer speak of revelation as a revelation of truths. The knowledge given in revelation is not the knowledge of facts but knowledge of a person. What God reveals is simply HIMSELF--His own character and disposition towards men.[46]

Smith contended further that it was precisely because Christianity rests on the reality of this fellowship between man and God that the idea of the supernatural is indispensable.

> Our Christian faith that God in Christ has made Himself personally known to us, has entered into personal relations with us is . . . in one word our faith in a supernatural self-manifestation of God; and the apologetic in which we seek to justify our Christian faith must have for its central point this idea of the supernatural.[47]

Traditional theology had been wrong in claiming for its starting point a supernatural communication of truth in which miracles occurred primarily to attest the divine commission of the prophet. The miracle had in this view a merely adventitious connection with the revelation, the

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[45] Lectures and Essays, p. 123.

[46] Ibid. Smith here enunciated a theme that has become a commonplace in contemporary Protestant theology. See for instance Daniel Day Williams, What Present Day Theologians are Thinking (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 79; Hugh D. McDonald, Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study, 1860-1960 (London: George, Allen, & Unwin Ltd., 1963), p. 33; H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1941); John Baille, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

[47] Lectures and Essays, p. 110.

revelation being a set of propositions to be believed. Smith argued to the contrary that miracles should be understood as the central facts of Christianity intrinsically related to the history of redemption. Moreover, miracles should not be viewed as isolated events each coming like "a meteor flashing through the sphere of man's spiritual vision," but rather as organically related events each revealing but a facet of the personality of God. From this standpoint the history of revelation becomes paramount.

> The miracles of Scripture are not isolated facts but a connected chain running onwards from the fall, and so interwoven with the history of redemption, that that history evacuated of miracles would be meaningless.[48]
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> As a witness to doctrine isolated miracles might suffice; but as a display of God's character a continuous action of God in history is needful. . . . Not one act but a whole life is needed fully to declare a character. And then this supernatural activity of God is not merely super added to natural history but enters into natural history, gradually moulding it in conformity with God's redemptive purpose.[49]

Smith was cautious here-- he would be less so later--so to state this doctrine of God's action in history as to preserve the truth of God's transcendence. "Revelation," he said, "is no mere organic process, no mere evolution of energies naturally existent in the world, but a new and specifically divine history let down into the world."[50]

So far Smith had concerned himself with the idea of revelation. His emphasis on revelation as the history of encounter between persons

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[48] Ibid., p. 120. Smith here is echoing these words of Rothe: "For my part I do not admit miracles from a sort of dogmatic cupidity, but in a historical interest; because in the presence of certain incontestable facts, I cannot do without miracles as furnishing the only rational explanation, not because they make gaps in history to my eyes, but because they rather help to cross over yawning abysses." Quoted in Lichtenberger, op. cit., p. 521.

[49] Lectures and Essays, p. 128. [50] Ibid., p. 126.

was a departure from received doctrine. His corresponding idea of inspiration was no less divergent from approved teaching. The traditional view (which Smith identified with Bannerman) was of the authentic relaying of an infallible communication of truth. While Smith, in agreement with orthodoxy, could say "side by side with the stream of miracle we have a stream of inspired prophecy," he did not mean by this the inscripturation of an infallible record. Inspiration was not a characteristic to be attributed to Scripture (as he later held it to be) but rather a phenomenon of the human consciousness. Inspiration, he said, "is not an imparting of knowledge, it is a renovation of the human consciousness [rendered necessary by the noetic effect of sin] whereby man is enabled to see God in manifestation."[51] It is not any guarantee of the accuracy of Scripture but its superior personality that causes later generations to value it.

> That the events of revelation can be brought before us in perfectly real and lively form only by a record at first-hand . . . is obvious. The great point is not the superior accuracy of a contemporary record, but its superior personality. In the record of an actor, the events of history live again. A subsequent historian may by the help of criticism produce a much more accurate narrative, but never a narrative possessing the same living power.[52]

Smith did not hesitate to draw out for his audience the full implication of his teaching. The infallibility of Scripture need no longer be either a cornerstone or a stumbling block. The Christian's certainty of knowledge of God rested on the unshakable ground of his encounter with God in the historically mediated person of Christ. "No criticism," said Smith, "can take from us our fellowship with God in Christ--no criticism can withdraw from the Bible its power as a medium

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[51] Ibid., pp. 129-30. [52] Ibid., p. 132.

wherein we are brought face to face with Christ; for a personal faith lies too deep to be touched by criticism."[53] At this point Smith seemed to have succumbed to that great delusion of his century: that the Jesus of history could be divorced from the Christ of faith.

Research and Controversy in the Scientific and Mathematical Fields

From his childhood Smith had been attracted to scientific studies.[54] That he had great potential for a scientific career is evident in that at Aberdeen University he led his class in natural philosophy and mathematics and that as a senior he won the Ferguson Scholarship, an honor his biographers call "the highest distinction in Scotland open to a student of his standing."[55] Smith resisted the advice of certain of his professors that he go on with scientific studies. During his last two years at New College, however, he again picked up the thread of his scientific interests. He divided his time between his divinity studies and working as an assistant to Professor Peter Gutherie Tait (1836-1901), the celebrated physicist at the University of Edinburgh. Tait was then at the height of his powers having recently with Sir William Thompson (afterwards Lord Kelvin) published findings in which "they showed once and for all that 'energy' was the fundamental physical entity and that its conservation was its predominating and controlling property."[56] During the period of Smith's association with Tait,

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[53] Ibid., p. 134.

[54] Supra, Ch. I.

[55] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 66.

[56] J. D. Hamilton Dickens, "Peter Gutherie Tait," Dictionary of National Biography, Second Supplement, III, 471-74.

the master was working on the problem of thermo-electricity. It has been said that Smith's friendship with Tait "was one of the most congenial of his whole life."[57] This was no doubt so in part because Tait, though a scientist, was a man of marked spiritual affinities. Early in their acquaintance Smith wrote rejoicing to his parents that "it is a comfort to know that our leading men of science are not all unbelievers."[58] One evidence of Tait's religious interests was the book he co-authored with Balfour Stewart in 1875 entitled The Unseen Universe; or Physical Speculations on the Future State in which they attempted to overthrow materialism on scientific grounds.

Thomas K. Cheyne, who later became one of Smith's closest colleagues, singled out P. G. Tait along with A. B. Davidson as the two most important influences on Smith's "extraordinarily rapid intellectual development" while a student in Edinburgh. Of Tait, Cheyne wrote that he confirmed Smith in his "love of original research and exact sciences and materially widened his outlook."[59] Cheyne was of the opinion that Smith's later work was much affected by the "insight into the methods of physical science . . . and the right use of hypothesis" he gained through working under Tait.[60]

Smith was charged with guiding the laboratory work of eight or ten students. His skill as an instructor was recalled by one former

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[57] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 105.

[58] Ibid., p. 106.

[59] Thomas Kelly Cheyne, Review of Black and Chrystal's Life of William Robertson Smith in The Christian Commonwealth (1912), p. 579.

[60] Cheyne, Founders of Old Testament Criticism, p. 213.

student who said, "his deftness at experiments and clearness of exposition were quite extraordinary, . . . the man commanded almost as much admiration from the students as did the master, which is saying a good deal."[61] Much of his time, however, was devoted to original researches of his own. There were enthusiastic reports in his letters to his parents about the experiments he was making. One such, he wrote, involved "taking a series of observations on the intensity of thermo-electric currents in junctions of copper and iron dipped in baths of different temperatures." Another he defined as "an experiment in absolute radiation."[62] Some of the fruit of these researches was presented in a paper given before the Royal Society of Edinburgh and published in its Proceedings under the title "On the Flow of Electricity in Conducting Surfaces."[63]

It was also during his years of collaboration with Tait that Smith wrote several polemical papers on the philosophy of mathematics. Smith's penchant for a Kantian epistemology was here again evident. His first skirmish was with the school of empirical logicians represented by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Alexander Bain (1818-1903). Smith had studied at the University of Aberdeen under Bain, a noted exponent of Scottish empiricism, and had found his philosophy uncongenial.[64]

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[61] Quoted by Sir James Frazer, Sir Roger de Coverley and Other Literary Pieces (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 197.

[62] Letter dated 7 January 1869 (Edinburgh), Smith MSS, 7449-5.

[63] Lectures and Essays, pp. 44-66. In the preface to this volume Dr. Hobson, one time Professor of Pure Mathematics at Cambridge, wrote of Smith's paper that it contained "detailed work which amounted to a distinct contribution to the development of the subject . . . and was regularly consulted by students for years afterwards."

[64] See Chapter I, Supra.

In his first published work, a paper entitled "Mr. Mill's Theory of Geometrical Reasoning Mathematically Tested," Smith attempted to show that the Euclidean axioms were not proved by induction as Mill argued in his Logic but by a single act of intuition. Mill, in keeping with his general position that all knowledge is derived from comparisons of distinct experimental facts, had argued in effect, said Smith, "that the man who reads Euc. I. 4. for the first time does not at once conclude the general truth of this formula from one figure before him but either brings the formula with him to the proof as the result of previous induction, or requires to pause in the proof to satisfy himself of the truth of the formula by a series of figures."[65] Smith found this simply not true to the facts of experience. The validity of an axiom, said Smith, is recognized on the basis of a single example. "There is no mental comparison of various figures needed during the proof."[66] Against Mill, Smith took the Kantian ground that Euclidean propositions are synthetic judgments a priori. They are therefore necessary (apodictic) truths knowable through a single act of intuition. In forwarding Mill a copy of the essay Smith wrote him a letter commending Kant as a philosopher who "though much misrepresented in Britain" yet "undoubtedly possessed a mathematical insight into the nature of space and time."[67] What Mill thought of the suggestion is not known for he simply responded to Smith as follows:

> I shall carefully keep your paper to be referred to when I next revise my logic, or otherwise write again on the subject and shall

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[65] Lectures and Essays, p. 7. [66] Ibid., p. 8.

[67] Draft of letter dated 30 March 1869 (Edinburgh), Smith MSS, 7449-5.

> then be able to give a more thorough examination to the various points raised by you than I have leisure for at present.[68]

It was Bain who rose in defense of his philosophical ally, Mill. In a private letter to Smith (which Smith said was "intended to be a crusher") Bain upbraided his former student for his "hypercritical and overdone" performance. He offered various mathematical rejoinders which need not concern us now. Suffice it to say that Smith responded by communicating yet another paper to the Royal Society, this one entitled "Note on Professor Bain's Theory of Euclid I. 4."[69] Thus did Smith begin to earn himself a reputation for pugnacity in polemics long before his religious notions were to set Scotland into a frenzy of controversy.

The Mill-Bain episode was followed by an extended debate over a far more abstruse mathematical question. The point at issue was what Smith understood to be Hegel's strictures against Newton's conception of the fluxional calculus. Hegelian philosophy was receiving wide attention at the moment through the efforts of such people as James Hutchison Stirling, author of the Secret of Hegel. In a paper entitled "Hegel and the Metaphysics of the Fluxional Calculus"[70] Smith entered the fray in the interest of defending Newton and by indirection Tait who was a latter day champion of Newtonian thought. Thus there was an element of academic vendetta once again. Speaking of this paper, which through Tait was communicated to the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Smith

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[68] Letter dated 6 April 1869, Ibid.

[69] Lectures and Essays, pp. 67-70.

[70] Ibid., pp. 13-43.

told his mother that "it was crude and certainly would not have been accepted . . . but for Tait's good offices which would be exerted for any attack on Hegel."[71]

The mathematical complexities of the ensuing conflict cannot be treated here. It is important to note though that while the specific point at issue was the validity of Newton's method for deducing the fluxion of a product the broader question was whether the mathematical infinite had a metaphysical significance as Hegel and Stirling maintained or whether Newton was correct in seeing in his understanding of time and space no metaphysical implication.[72] (The shade of Kant in Smith's concerns is surely here again evident.) Stirling claimed that Hegel by virtue of his superior mathematical insights had shown the "internal truth" where Newton had been satisfied with something less.[73]

Smith conceived his own function as one of championing "Newton's clear ideas" against Hegel's "vague pomposities." He was most incautious in his language speaking of Hegel, and by implication of Stirling, as guilty of "substantial ignorance" and "incredible confusion of mind."[74] Hegel had never understood Newton much less having improved on him! Smith was clearly perturbed by the growing influence of Hegelian philosophy in British speculation. He lamented the fact that the day had passed when "it would probably have been difficult to find

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[71]Letter dated 16 July 1869, Smith MSS, 7449-5.

[72]Lectures and Essays, p. 19. The kind of issue Smith joined here had had a long history in Scottish mathematical disputation. See the chapter "Mathematics without Metaphysics" in George Elder Davie, The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and Her Universities in the Nineteenth Century (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1961), pp. 127-49.

[73]Lectures and Essays, p. 25. [74]Ibid., p. 43.

in Britain anyone ready to maintain the cause of Hegel . . . or even to hint that the astounding arguments of the Naturphilosophie flowed from any deeper source than self-complacent ignorance.[75] There is an element of irony here in that Smith later came to subscribe to an understanding of history and of religious and cultural evolution which in its German roots was to no small degree indebted to Hegel.

After the delivery of Smith's paper before the Royal Society the site of the conflict shifted to the pages of the Edinburgh Evening Courant. There was an extensive exchange of views but the ferocity of the combatants can be discerned from the opening salvos. Stirling began by taking Smith to task for conduct unbecoming a scholar.

> I would say one word to Mr. Smith on the purely controversial attitude of his paper. Mr. Smith is unquestionably a young man of talent and promise, but he had the elan of his years and may be visited with regret yet. He does not hesitate in almost every case to distort the averments of his authors and apply them to issues such as the authors never contemplated.[76]

In his rejoinder Smith turned the center of dispute back on Hegel's mathematical abilities. He said:

> I think I may fairly remonstrate against the accusation of injustice directed against me by Dr. Stirling, on the ground that Hegel as a student of the arts "could not be guilty of the barbarous ignorance imputed to him." My paper offers a detailed proof from his own writings that Hegel did commit gross mathematical blunders. I have been compelled by my reading of Hegel to conclude him ignorant and culpably ignorant.[77]

Four years later Dr. Stirling offered a full dress rebuttal to these charges. He appended to the publication of his Philosophy of Law

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[75] Ibid., p. 13.

[76] The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 28 December 1869.

[77] Ibid., 29 December 1869.

a chapter entitled "Hegel and W. R. Smith or the Vindication of the Former in a Mathematical Regard." Stirling now attempted to show that Hegel and Newton were in practical agreement. Smith's problem was that he really did not understand Hegel's position. Stirling concluded by lumping the views of Smith and his friends under the general heading of "rabid nonsense."[78]

Smith appears to have uttered the last public word in this controversy with his essay "Dr. Stirling, Hegel, and the Mathematicians" which appeared in the Fortnightly Review of April 1873. The mathematical details of such controversy would no doubt be of greater significance for Smith's biography if he had chosen to devote his life to the pursuit of the kind of problems therein discussed. As things stand these scientific and mathematical incursions are of interest primarily as evidence of Smith's precocious and catholic intellect, of his aggressiveness and tenacity in public debate, and of the cast of his mind as he neared the end of his formal education. It is clear that the empiricism which has so often characterized Scottish thinkers in Smith's case

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[78]James Hutchison Stirling, Lectures on the Philosophy of Law together with Whewell and Hegel, and Hegel and Mr. W. R. Smith, a Vindication in a Physico-Mathematical Regard (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1873), pp. 134, 139. Writing to a Dr. Ingleby in April, 1873, Stirling summarized his position on Smith as follows: "Now, the question with me is, not, Is Hegel correct?--but is Smith (or Whewell) correct about Hegel? In regard to Smith, I show in my 'Greenbook' that Smith is diametrically wrong simply in his naming of the matter in Hegel. . . . When what Hegel really says is seen, I am quite willing that what is a blunder on the part of Hegel should be called that. . . . It is those blunders of Smith's that constitute my whole business--in the Green book. . . . Let Hegel be really wrong, you will never find any attempt in me to throw them out in saying so, or for saying so--I show up only what they [Whewell and Smith] wrongly say." Quoted in Amelia Hutchison Stirling, James Hutchison Stirling: His Life and Work (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), p. 193.

had known the chastening of the Kantian critique. It is clear, too, that Smith was averse to any thinking which sought to transcend human finitude in flights of metaphysical speculation. This latter characteristic was noted by Sir James G. Frazer (1854-1941), a man who certainly knew Smith's mind intimately. While observing that Smith was a most able theoretician, Frazer added:

> Though his intellect was of the grand order, always busied with large questions of history, life, and nature, it always moved within the limits within which evidence is attainable and knowledge possible to man. He seemed to turn instinctively from matters that lie beyond the scope of human knowledge, from those problems insoluble to human reason which have exercised a morbid attraction on some minds, and have been the theme of endless and heated but always vain and fruitless, discussion through all ages.[79]

Smith Brings Ritschlian Thought to the Free Church

In the spring of 1869 Smith rejected the offer of a professorship in mathematics at Agra, a University in British India. In telling his father of his decision he explained, "I'm still bent on going into the Church, and therefore cannot entertain the idea."[80] In April with his friend (and later biographer) John Sutherland Black, Smith departed for a semester of study at the University of Göttingen. Though in this summer he made the acquaintance of many eminent men of science,[81] it was evident from his letters that the great attraction was the

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[79] Frazer, Sir Roger de Coverley and Other Literary Pieces, p. 203.

[80] Quoted in Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 108.

[81] In Göttingen Smith became acquainted with the physicists Weber and Kohlrausch and renewed his acquaintance with the mathematician Klein whom he had met earlier in Bonn. The following excerpt from a letter dated 29 July 1869 is indicative of Smith's academic contacts: "I came to Heidelberg on Monday and have been kindly received by Helmholz and Kirchoff, who showed me their collections. I also had some intercourse with several Private-docenten and junior professors

theologian Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889).[82] In his first letter from Göttingen, Smith told of attending Ritschl's lectures. "Ritschl," he wrote, "is a strong Calvinist and has been giving a very interesting lecture against the Lutheran doctrine of the law in the N. T. He is a man of great acuteness and his lectures are of a kind that will be directly useful in Scotland."[83] A few weeks later he wrote, "I have never heard anything so interesting on a theological subject as Ritschl's lectures. He has evidently such thorough clearness in his own views and such complete acquaintance with the views of others as to make his lectures exceedingly interesting."[84] By the end of the summer his praise knew no bounds. "Ritschl has been very profitable," he wrote, "far the best course of lectures I ever heard."[85]

There are good reasons why Robertson Smith found Ritschl's theology so appealing. Ritschl, it has been said, saved Christianity from degenerating into Hegelianism.[86] In the golden days of the Tübingen

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whom Nöther introduced to me. Nöther is one of the young mathematical doctors in Göttingen. With him, Klein (Editor of Plücher's posthumous works), and another, Kierholzer, I drank Bruderschaft last week, so of course Nöther gave me an introduction of a friend, Hartmann, who again brought me into his circle of professors." Smith MSS, 7449-5. In his later capacity as editor of the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica Smith would find these contacts invaluable.

[82]A good introduction to Ritschl's thought is H. R. Mackintosh, op. cit., pp. 136-74.

[83]Letter to father dated 8 May 1869 (Göttingen), Smith MSS, 7449-5.

[84]Letter to father dated 24 May 1869 (Göttingen), Smith MSS, 7449-5.

[85]Letter to father dated 12 August 1869 (Göttingen), Smith MSS, 7449-5.

[86]See the chapter entitled "From Straus to Ritschl" in Alec R. Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 101-11.

School, when David Strauss (1808-1874) and Friedrick Baur (1792-1860) had won a wide following for their reinterpretation of Christianity as an illustration of Hegelian philosophy, it was Albrecht Ritschl, once one of Baur's most promising disciples,[87] who led a reaction against the intrusion of Hegelianism and every other kind of metaphysics into Christianity. In his anti-metaphysical bias Ritschl had not merely returned to Kant. He accepted Kant's dictum that things-in-themselves are unknowable; only appearances are apprehended by the pure reason. But Ritschl introduced a distinction which made a positive theology possible once again. It can be said of Ritschl that:

> He held that things-in-themselves can be known through their action upon us and through our response to them. Thus, while God in abstraction from the world cannot be proved by the traditional arguments for theism yet he can be known through the revelation in which he makes a personal impact upon men.[88]

"Every claim," Ritschl said, "to teach something concerning God in himself apart from some real revelation on his part, felt and perceived on our part, is baseless."[89] The reality of God's personal revelation as the only starting point in theology was a position with which Smith was in heartiest agreement. It was no coincidence that Ritschl had studied under Rothe, the "mediating" theologian so highly regarded by Smith.

The letters from Göttingen to Keig contain long discussions of

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[87] Smith explained this fact to his father as follows: "Ritschl was a pupil of Baur's but too acute to remain in the Tübingen school and was accordingly renounced by Baur both scientifically and personally. He now takes a very independent course freely criticizing the established positions but cherishing much greater respect for the reformers than for the present dogmatics. In fact the Old Reformation dogmatic seems to be what he most values." Letter dated 24 May 1869 (Göttingen), Smith MSS, 7449-5. Cf. Philip Hefner, "Baur versus Ritschl on Early Christianity," Church History, XXXI (1962), pp. 359-78.

[88] Vidler, op. cit., p. 108. [89] Ibid.

those Ritschlian ideas which had captured Smith's imagination. For instance there was the question of the relation in which the individual and the individual's religious experience stands to the community of Christians. Ritschl, though his thought owed much to Schleiermacher's pietistic method of basing theology on the interrogation of the believer's religious consciousness, had a marked aversion to subjectivism.[90] He attempted to avoid this pitfall by a due consideration of the life, teaching, and works of Christ as an objective point of reference (Ritschl did not share the prevalent skepticism about the historicity of the Gospels) and by stressing the importance of the historical Church as a normative witness to Christian Truth. In this connection Smith was struck by Ritschl's critique of the un-churchly individualism of the Protestant sects particularly in their emphasis on a "conversion experience." Smith wrote approvingly to his father of Ritschl's idea that:

> The Sects treat the Church merely as the sum of saved individuals. They demand that every member should have an empirical certainty of his saved state. . . . The Church, on the other hand, while not denying that such an empirically given conversion is possible does not demand that a man should have such experience--For the Church recognizes the fact that the Church is before the individual, that it is in the Church that God's grace works, and that the development of the individual Christian takes place in the Church.[91]

Ritschl's stress on the priority of the community to the individual, of the Church to the believer,[92] is a concept to which Smith recurred in many contexts.

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[90] See the discussion of this point in Mackintosh, op. cit., pp. 142-45.

[91] Letter dated 7 July 1869 (Göttingen), Smith MSS, 7449-5.

[92] Mackintoch, op. cit., pp. 164-65, defined Ritschl's stance on this point as follows: "For him the Church is the communio sanctorum,

This summer of study at Göttingen was the beginning for Smith of a lifelong friendship and extensive correspondence with Albrecht Ritschl. John Sutherland Black, Smith's friend, biographer, and co-laborer in the spreading of Ritschl's ideas in Great Britain[93] did not hesitate to call Smith a "Ritschlian." In fact, late in his life Smith placed Ritschl along with Richard Rothe and Andrew Bruce Davidson as among the leading influences on the development of his theological viewpoint.[94]

Smith returned to Edinburgh in September, 1869, to take up his last year of study at New College. If some major shifts had occurred in his theological posture since his matriculation three years earlier it can be safely said that these had come largely through contacts with German theological scholarship and not by virtue of his Free Church professors. We are most fortunate in having an extensive statement from Smith's pen indicating where he stood theologically as he neared the end of his formal education for the ministry. The occasion for the statement was his Presidential Address, entitled "On the Work of a Theological Society,"[95] given before the New College Theological Society on 8 November, 1869. Some months earlier his paper

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the living body of believers, in the midst of which the redeeming Gospel of Christ endures throughout the generations. It is within this Church, truly represented by its members however imperfect, that the individual comes into saving attachment to the Lord. The grace that he meets and enjoys he could not have discovered in Luther's phrase 'all by himself in a corner'; it is invariably put within reach by those who witness to its reality."

[93]In the preface to his translation of Ritschl's The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation (1872) John Sutherland Black acknowledged Smith's assistance.

[94]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 534.

[95]Lectures and Essays, pp. 137-62.

"Christianity and the Supernatural" had provoked an unsuccessful attempt by one of the more conservative students to secure a motion binding all members of the Society to absolute acceptance of the statements of Scripture.[96] This incident led Smith in this subsequent address to raise the problem of theological method. Though it was by no means cast in a biographical form, in this statement Smith put his finger firmly on the pulse of his own recent religious and intellectual life. His concepts, indeed his very vocabulary, betrayed the extent to which his own heart had been won by a romanticism which though flowing in the deepest currents of the age was yet a style of thought alien to most of his brethren.

Smith opened up to its manifold and momentous ramifications the question of how the Scriptures are related to the creeds and to theological discourse. Was theological progress a matter of drawing evermore accurate deductions from the fixed axioms of Scripture or did it demand in Smith's words "a recognition of a positive activity of the theologising subject dialectically evolving the contents of an internal consciousness"?[97] The orthodox position was that the Bible contained divinely communicated propositions. The creeds and theologies were then derived by a process of deduction; the theologian's task was a purely formal one of classifying the revealed data.[98] Theological

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[96]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 103-04.

[97]Lectures and Essays, p. 151.

[98]For an able discussion of this position see John Warwick Montgomery, "The Theologian's Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVII (1966), 67-98.

discourse on this view, Smith said, could only be polemical; it could not bring a dialectical advancement toward the truth. The truth had been fully, indeed infallibly, given in Scripture. Conflicting theologies could be reconciled only as more adequate exegesis made refutation or vindication possible. For example the differences between Calvinists and Lutherans must be considered to be the result of logical slips made by all the theologians of one church and none of the theologians of the other. "Slips of that kind," observed Smith, "may be made by individuals but not surely by all the theologians of one Church and no theologian of another."[99] The conservative theologians of the day, said Smith, recognized this problem but answered it by saying that the Christian system of doctrine was less explicitly set forth in Scripture than might be desired or than was once claimed to be the case. This admission, said Smith, led him to the conclusion that:

> The confession is to us no longer the spontaneous utterance of the faith of the Church, offered for subscription only because no one who sincerely accepts Scripture could for a moment hesitate to endorse its doctrines, but a theological formula claiming an independent theological value as a statement of doctrine, and devised as a more crucial test of theological views than the words of Scripture afford.[100]

But this, thought Smith, was a dangerous stance for the Protestant to take for it seemed to be setting theology above the Bible.

The way out of these problems was clear to Smith but a major reorientation was required. We must recognize, said Smith, that:

> Our theological systems are not simply <u>deductions</u> from Scripture, . . . they are the product of an activity of the human mind which is not merely <u>formal</u>, not mere classification of immediately revealed data, but the development, in a dialectical process, into more and more

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[99] <u>Lectures and Essays</u>, p. 142. [100] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 145.

> definite scientific form, of a religious consciousness which must always find its canon in Scripture, but which none the less has a life and growth of its own. . . .[101]

Such a transition from a theology that advanced "by deduction from axioms that lie outside the theologian" to one that sees advancement "by evolution of a consciousness lying within him" was as Smith plainly explained a move from the "philosophy of the eighteenth century as exhibited in Butler" into that of the nineteenth in which "the real restorers of believing theology were . . . followers mainly of Schleiermacher."[102]

Smith then turned to a consideration of the charge that the view he was espousing was rationalistic. To this Smith answered that the matter was quite the reverse. Those orthodox theologians like Charles Hodge[103] who equated Scripture with the Word of God felt required to prove the authority and inspiration of Scripture. To do so they invoked a line of apologetic argument that rested on natural reason and probability. The real basis of theology said Smith, became:

> An apologetical enquiry into the evidences for Christianity with the view of bringing out the doctrine of inspiration in isolation from all other doctrines as the absolute prius in the system of Christian theology, capable of being demonstrated by evidence convincing to those who have not experienced the power of Christianity.[104]

This resting of theology on a foundation of natural reasoning Smith branded "Pelagianism of the intellect," a sort of rationalism that was the very antithesis of the Reformation principles these apologists claimed to venerate. The Reformers did not begin with intellectual assent to the "fundamentalia" but with experimental conviction, with a

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[101] Ibid., p. 147. [102] Ibid., p. 148.

[103] See note 7 supra. [104] Lectures and Essays, pp. 153-54.

consciousness of new life that gave rise to a "theologia regeneratorum."

> Nor, indeed, could it be otherwise. So long as the Church of the Reformation was rejoicing in the discovery that forgiveness of sins and all the privileges which Christ bought for His Church are not to be applied to men in a magical manner by a privileged caste which alone can say whether the application is effectual, but that fellowship with God in Christ is a living personal fellowship of which we can be as fully assured as of fellowship with our fellow-men; so long as it was understood that the consciousness of this fellowship with God is no mere subjective feeling but the consciousness of a life far more true than the natural life which no man dreams of doubting--a life which is not bounded by the circuit of my own subjectivity, but in which I am linked together with all my fellow-believers with the whole Church and its glorious Head--a life which is hid with Christ in God, but which is not so hid that it does not manifest itself even now as a real life in, though not of the world, absorbing into itself my whole earthly life; so long as all this was felt, it was impossible for the Church to turn away from the assurance of its calling in Christ which it bore within itself and base the scientific exposition of its position as a Church--and to be such an exposition is the aim of Protestant theology--on mere grounds of natural reason and probability.
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> The Church is not redeemed by its theology; it theologises because it is redeemed. Theology has done its work when it has given scientific expression to all that is bound up in the consciousness of redemption and the life that flows therefrom.[105]

The starting point for Reformed theology was the consciousness of redemption realized in the believer's heart by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. Doctrine was not the first thing for "it is from this consciousness outward that the Christian develops for himself a true notion of God and a true notion of man."[106] Doctrine while revealed in a true sense by God was yet a human construct "for though presented to a man's mind from the outside yet it has to be made over again from the inside as soon as the Holy Spirit has begun true faith in the soul."[107]

If the accusation of rationalism against the newer theology was ill-founded what of the charge of mysticism and of unrestrained

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[105] Ibid., pp. 154-55. [106] Ibid., p. 157.

[107] Ibid., p. 157.

subjectivism? Smith's answer revealed the unmistakable marks of his recent contacts with Albrecht Ritschl. Like Ritschl he points to the historical Christ and the impact He made on his contemporaries as the norm of true spiritual life.

> If our intelligible Christ differs from the Christ of history, if the salvation we receive differs from the salvation which Christ bestowed on those who were eye-witnesses of His saving work, then we may be sure either that we have argued falsely from our faith, or that our faith itself is false, having its source within ourselves and not in a true operation of God which can never be out of harmony with His working in days gone by.[108]

Moreover, tendencies to subjectivism will be checked by a proper recognition of the Church's character as an organism "in which no part can be developed save in and through the development of the whole."[109] The theology of the individual is always one-sided and must ever be corrected and supplemented by the faith of the Church as a whole. This is a dynamic and dialectical process in which theology advances "to an ever fuller and fuller comprehension of the ideal relation between Christ and the Church made perfect."[110]

Though the charge would be made often enough later, one would not conclude at this point that Smith had abandoned the Faith of his fathers. Nevertheless, all that he said must be understood with a full recognition that nothing less than a shift in the moorings of theology had in fact occurred. Smith emphatically rejected natural theology, propositional revelation, an infallible Bible, and a static system of doctrine. No less emphatically he affirmed the reality of God's self-disclosure in and through the history of redemption. In revelation God

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[108] Ibid., p. 160 [109] Ibid., p. 161.

[110] Ibid., p. 162.

did not give a set of propositions to which assent is to be given after reason has somehow certified their inspiration. God gives Himself in such a way that only the response of personal faith will lead to knowledge. The record of revelation is human and therefore fallible. Likewise the doctrines revered in the Church are the fruit of the believer's reflection on the meaning of the revelatory events. "Doctrines of theology are the product of faith, the knowledge of the subject and object of faith which are evolved by dialectical necessity from the primitive act itself."[111] Though Smith claimed the authority of the Protestant reformers for his position it is surely evident that he was profoundly influenced by currents of thought flowing in the wake of the Kantian revolution. Smith's conversion to Neo-Protestant thought was the preparation for, not a consequence of, a recognition of the correctness of particular higher critical assertions about the Bible. The understanding of theology, particularly of the doctrine of revelation, which Smith adopted in his student years opened the door to his later radical speculation as to the human side of the Bible.

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[111] Ibid., p. 157.

CHAPTER III

SMITH AND THE "COPERNICAN REVOLUTION" IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES, 1870-75

Between the time of his appointment to the faculty of the Free Church College in 1870 and the publication of his Encyclopedia Britannica article "Bible" in December, 1875, Smith's thinking about Old Testament religion appears to have undergone a considerable revolution. Since he was destined to become one of the best known English speaking advocates of the radical reinterpretation of Old Testament history and religion often associated with the names of its early continental representatives, Kuenen, Graf, and Wellhausen, it is of considerable interest to follow the process so far as possible that brought Smith into alliance with the thought of these men.

Appointment to the Hebrew Chair

Smith's brilliance in every academic task to which he turned his mind was a publicly recognized phenomenon by the time he reached his last year of study in Edinburgh. Such was his celebrity that though he was still a student he was invited in the fall of 1869 to join the Edinburgh Evening Club. The Club was an exclusive selection of Edinburgh's leading men who met weekly for serious discussions on predetermined subjects. Of the many lasting friendships resulting for Smith from this affiliation none was more important to his later

scholarship than that with the barrister John Ferguson McLennan (1827-1881). McLennan's articles on "The Worship of Animals and Plants" were being published in the Fortnightly Review at the time Smith made his acquaintance. The year earlier his book on Primitive Marriage had appeared. Smith would derive from McLennan's amateur anthropological researches some key materials for his own theory of totemism.[1]

The incumbent in the Chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis at the Free Church College, Aberdeen, died in September, 1869. Professor Davidson immediately advanced the name of his favorite pupil, who had been assisting him as of that year in teaching elementary Hebrew, as the man best able to fill the vacated Chair. The availability of older, more experienced scholars, his own lack of pastoral experience and his youth (he was but twenty-three) made Smith reluctant to enter the contest. But after being convinced that he did have a chance of carrying the necessary votes in the Church's General Assembly, Smith allowed his friends to organize a campaign in his behalf. Testimonials were secured and circulated including glowing letters from such German academic friends as Schaarschmidt, Kamphausen, and Ritschl. Certainly most influential in winning the votes of the fathers and brethren was A. B. Davidson's unqualified endorsement of his pupil.

> Mr. Smith is by far the most distinguished student I have ever had in my department. By this I mean not only that his acquirements are greater, but that they are of a different kind. Mr. Smith not only knows Hebrew well, but he knows well that which constitutes Hebrew, or any other of that class of languages. He knows more perfectly than any young man I ever came across the principles both of the Grammar and of the Idiom of the Semitic languages. This knowledge he has arrived at, partly by his own very great talent, and partly by the study of such scientific Grammars as that

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[1]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 116.

> of Ewald, with which he has a great familiarity. But his acquirements in Old Testament scholarship are not confined to the knowledge of the language. Having had opportunities of being several summers on the Continent, and hearing some of the most distinguished lecturers there, he has made great advancement in Sacred Criticism. He has written for me several essays, particularly one very extensive one on the Divine Names in Genesis, and another on Prophecy, which displayed not only learning, but ability of a very high kind. For what is surprising in so young a man is the maturity as well as the striking independence of his mind. From all I have been able to see, I consider that the department of Old Testament learning is the one most congenial to Mr. Smith, and in which he is most likely to do good work; and if he were placed in a position favourable, there is almost no result too high for the Church to expect from him.[2]

His own efforts to commend himself as a worthy candidate occasioned Smith's first published words on Old Testament religion. Through the influence of his new friend, McLennan, Smith's paper "On the Question of Prophecy in the Critical Schools of the Continent" appeared in the British Quarterly Review for April, 1870.[3] The essay was a convincing demonstration of Smith's familiarity with au courant Biblical scholarship, his measured appreciation of the accomplishments and pitfalls of the critical method, and his obvious passion for a defense of the enduring values at the heart of Old Testament religion. It was a performance calculated to appeal at least to the more progressive spirits among those on whom his election depended. Smith reviewed the handling of the Old Testament prophets in the works of Abraham Kuenen, Heinrich Ewald, and Gustav Baur.[4] These men were all

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[2] Ibid., pp. 119-20.

[3] Reprinted in Lectures and Essays, pp. 163-203.

[4] The specific works under consideration were the second edition of Ewald's Prophets (1867-68), the second part of Kuenen's Historical and Critical Inquiry (1863), the first part of Kuenen's Religion of Israel (1869), and the first part of Baur's History of Old Testament Prophecy (1861).

practitioners of higher criticism but in their methodologies, theological presuppositions, and critical conclusions were by no means in agreement. Smith was able to make clear simultaneously his acquaintance with a wide spectrum of scholarship on the prophets and to reveal his own sympathy for only a particular type of higher criticism. He was at pains to show that as practiced by scholars, such as Baur, who had spiritual affinities for the subject matter, higher criticism resulted in a real advance in understanding the Bible. On the other hand a man with wholly naturalistic suppositions, such as Kuenen, would be led into profound error in his critical research.

The common supposition of all higher criticism, Smith said, was the organic unity of history as it continually unfolds in one great plan. To find the inner kernel of that development in the words of men contemporaneous with any given stage of it is the proper work of the critic. To do this he must judge the historical authenticity of his records in light of the supposition of historical continuity. "A tradition that violates the continuity of historical evolution and stands in no necessary relation to the conditions preceding and following must be untrue."[5]

But the word organic has a variety of meanings. To one scholar (Kuenen) it means "the unbroken sweep of natural law without one breath of the creative Spirit from on high. . . ."[6] While to another the

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[5]Lectures and Essays, p. 165.

[6]Ibid. That Smith did less than justice to Kuenen's views is evident from a reading of Kuenen's excellent essay "Critical Method," Modern Review, I (1880), 461-88, 685-713, in which he treated many of the theoretical issues which have since dominated historiographic discussion. On the matter of miracles Kuenen did not take the naturalistic stance often attributed to him. He admitted that miracles were

organic principle is joined with the confidence that "the one purpose of history is the purpose of everlasting love, worked out, in and through human personality, by a Personal redeeming God."[7] Smith illustrated this contrast by showing how his representative scholars differed in their treatment of particular episodes in Israelitic history. It was Smith's contention that a Kuenen, who subscribed to the "unbroken law" idea, could not do justice to the spirit and the originality of Old Testament prophecy. He could ascribe to the prophet no really new creative thought. All must be reduced to the psychology of ordinary life. All evidence of extraordinary prevision must be explained away. However, a scholar like Ewald, while not uncritical in his treatment of the same episode, nevertheless, could "ascribe to the prophet a spiritual insight into the course of Jahveh's purpose which no man could attain by mere natural reasoning. They are the thoughts of Jahveh, not thoughts of his own that the prophet thinks; and so he is able to apprehend new combinations in history before they begin to arise."[8] Smith's sympathies were clearly with the latter view. But where then do the students of higher criticism differ from the conventional, pre-critical scholars. For one thing the critics have shown how intimately prophecy is rooted in the prophet's own time. For the critics, even the believing critics, prophecy is not essentially predictive. As Smith put it:

> The critical study of prophecy has done no greater service than to point out how small a fraction of the prophetic writing is strictly

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historically possible but said he found the evidence in every case he had investigated less than convincing. P. 485.

[7] Lectures and Essays, p. 165. [8] Ibid., p. 169.

> predictive. Not detailed events lying in the future, but broad religious principles, are the ground on which the prophets are at home. But then these principles are grasped with such firmness, with so concrete a hold, that they never remain floating, as it were, in the air, but are always applied with confidence to the special needs and circumstances of the theocracy."[9]

There is an element of prediction in the Prophets. The hypothesis which makes all prophecy post eventum is not that of the best of modern criticism. But when on grounds other than those of prediction a prophecy is found not to accord with the age in which it purports to arise it must be allowed to fall in the period with which it does harmonize. Such an instance according to Smith was the latter half of the Book of Isaiah (Chapters 40-66).

> Take, for example, the second half of Isaiah, the grand trilogy that describes the restoration from the captivity in Babylon. It is not the prediction of the return that makes these chapters be placed by all critics in the later years of the captivity itself, for a prediction as precise was certainly uttered by Jeremiah; it is not the conception of a captivity of Babel that is viewed as impossible to Isaiah, for Micah we know anticipated such an event; it is not even the mention of Cyrus by name that is urged, for those who are puzzled by that fact could much more readily suggest an interpolation. But the author of these chapters speaks everywhere to the exiled people; he speaks to them face to face, with the pathos, the hope, the indignation of one who shared their sufferings and beheld their sins: he speaks to them in conceptions fitted to an age when Jerusalem stood no longer, and the Davidic House had ceased to reign: he has dropped, for example, the notion of a Davidic Messiah, and gives a still deeper and more wondrous picture of salvation through the suffering and death of the Servant of Jahveh, followed up by a glorious triumphal appearance of the Covenant God in person, filling His land and illumining His people with eternal radiance: in one word, if Isaiah wrote these chapters he lived two lives--not a natural and a prophetic life, but two prophets' lives, one in his own day, and one in the far future. And if this be the real state of the case, Isaiah will be to the critic, for all practical purposes, two men; the whole historical significance of these chapters must still be transferred from the age of Hezekiah to the age of Labynetus.[10]

Smith can be admired for his honesty in thus boldly treading on

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[9] Ibid., p. 176. [10] Ibid., pp. 181-82.

dangerous ground. He surely knew that he could not win the support of his more conservative friends in the General Assembly by challenging such time honored traditions as the unity of the Book of Isaiah.

In his concern to trace a pathway between a spiritually barren rationalism and the pre-critical religiosity of his heritage, the article as a whole betrayed Smith's affiliation with the German mediating school of theology. But Smith found one vital question relating to the prophets wherein the rationalists and conservatives occupied the same ground. Here no mediation was required and the battle line could be drawn on a single front. The question had to do with the mode of prophetic inspiration. The conservative doctrine of inspiration and the rationalist explanation of prophetic phenomena had in common, said Smith, a conception of the prophet as a passive instrument rather than as a morally responsible agent.[11] A Hengstenberg (a leading conservative German Old Testament scholar who enjoyed considerable popularity in Great Britain)[12] and a Kuenen unwittingly occupied the same ground. Their common hypothesis was that prophetic utterances came as a result of ecstatic, non-rational experience. Kuenen's position as quoted by Smith was that:

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[11] Smith recurred to this issue again and again in his lectures and writings. The moral freedom and cognitive self-possession of the prophets was for him a hallmark of Biblical as opposed to heathen religion.

[12] On Ernest Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802-1869) see T. K. Cheyne, Founders of Old Testament Criticism, pp. 127-31. Though Smith does not mention a particular passage from Hengstenberg's works he no doubt had in mind such a statement as follows: "The true prophets, . . . were in a state essentially unlike their ordinary condition; a state of ecstasy in which use of their rational powers was suspended, their own agency ceased, and they became completely passive under an overpowering influence of the Spirit of God; . . ." Ernest Wilhelm Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament, trans. by Ruel Keith (3 vols.; Alexandria, D. C.: William M. Morrison, 1836), Vol. I, p. 218.

> The person who is seized and breathed into by the Godhead falls into ecstasy; either into so strong a transport that he wholly loses his self-possession, utters sounds without clear consciousness, and even resembles a madman, or, it may be, simply into an excited condition, in which he expresses with emphasis and enthusiasm the testimony of the Godhead in his inner man.[13]

For Kuenen, it is true, these ecstatic experiences were given a purely natural explanation. Further, it must be admitted that prophetic phenomena properly characterized as ecstatic are occasionally mentioned in Scripture and that most non-Biblical instances of prophetism are justly described by Kuenen's words. Smith's contention was that such behavior was not normative for Israelitic prophetism. The argument hinged in part on philological considerations into which we cannot enter but it is apparent, as well, that for Smith the essence of prophetic teaching was a kind of ethical insight wholly incompatible with either Hengstenberg's conservative idea of inspired amenuenses or Kuenenian speculation about psychotic frenzy. Smith's own position, if true to the Bible, was no less colored by overtones borrowed from the personalism and moralism of nineteenth century German philosophical idealism running from Kant to Ritschl. Smith's words here are worthy of quotation:

> We must seek the true mark of the prophet in something higher than passive ecstasy--in the personal sympathy between himself and Jahveh, by virtue of which the God-sent thought approves itself to him inwardly, and not by mere external authority. In this conclusion lies the key to the position of the believing school of critics. History deals with persons, not with things. The historical interest of prophecy does not lie in tracing a sharp line of separation between the Divine and human, but in realizing the personal union of these two factors in the evolution of Israel's history. And so the prophet presents himself to the critical inquirer, less in the light of one who is the passive subject of supernatural influence, than as a man whose life and thoughts are determined by

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[13] Lectures and Essays, p. 193.

> personal fellowship with Jahveh and by intelligent insight into his purpose. No doubt what is personal always rests on a background of the non-personal, a background of merely physical elements which are initially passive under the creative hand of God; but to deal with these elements is not the function of historical inquiry. The limit of personal life is the limit of critical investigation.[14]

While individual points in the essay could have given the impeccably orthodox ample evidence of this young scholar's "unsound bent," the total effect of the performance was rather to establish Smith as a man who knew the enemy's strengths and weaknesses and who was peculiarly equipped to carry forward the battle for God's truth. Indeed the only publicly stated objections to his candidacy were based on his youth and lack of pastoral experience. When the several hundred delegates to the General Assembly met in May of 1870 they chose Smith by an ample majority over the two other contenders for the Chair. Rev. Pirie Smith, who for weeks with unflagging zeal had been promoting his son's candidacy, wrote to his wife from Edinburgh, "It is marvellous how much satisfaction Willie's election has given the whole Church."[15]

The "Copernican Revolution" in Old Testament Studies

Before turning to a close examination of Smith's conversion to a particular school of criticism it will be necessary to make an excursus into the general state of Old Testament study in the early 1870's. The decade from 1866 to 1876 saw the rise of an entirely new perspective on the whole development of ancient Israel.[16] The name most often

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[14] Ibid., pp. 186-87. [15] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 122.

[16] Leroy Waterman, "A Half-Century of Biblical and Semitic Investigation," American Journal of Semitic Languages, XXXII (1916), 219-29, cites the following as indicative of the revolutionary Old Testament scholarship of the decade: Graf, Die geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten

linked with this new viewpoint is that of Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). In his Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels (Berlin, 1883),[17] Wellhausen achieved a magisterial synthesis of the researches of a host of predecessors all stated within a philosophical framework perfectly suited to the intellectual temper of the times.[18] Like the biological theories of Charles Darwin, Wellhausen's ideas were geared to the historical consciousness of the age.[19] They were genetic, evolutionary, progressive and scientific.[20] But though Wellhausen's conception of the Old Testament was precisely what the Zeitgeist demanded, it was purchased at the price of a radical inversion of the traditional idea of Biblical history.[21] The upshot of this veritable "Copernican Revolution" has been summarized as follows:

Testaments (1866); Kuenen, Gottesdienst von Israel (1869-70); Duhm, Theologie der Propheten (1869); Kayser, Vorexilisches Buch der Urgeschichte (1874); Wellhausen's essay in Jahrbuch für Deutsch Theologie (1876).

[17] English translation by John Sutherland Black with a preface by W. Robertson Smith (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885).

[18] "In every age exegesis has conformed to the thought forms of the time, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century thought was dominated by the scientific method and an evolutionary view of history." Herbert F. Hahn, The Old Testament in Modern Research (Expanded edition; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 10.

[19] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[20] "The characteristic of the Age of Liberalism in theological thinking, as in other branches of thought, was a belief in progress. As man had developed from the amoeba to the full flower of Victorian maturity, so much religion be regarded as a development from its primitive form of animism to its finished form in Christianity." William Neil, The Rediscovery of the Bible (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954), p. 34.

[21] The great philosopher of historical progress was G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel's influence on Wellhausen was mediated through Wilhelm Vatke. As early as 1835, in his Biblischer Theologie, Vatke had concluded that the law and cult associated with the name of Moses must

> While a virtually unanimous tradition affirms the five books of Moses to be the most ancient documents of Hebraic literature, and consequently to antedate the prophets, the school of Wellhausen puts off the solemn promulgation of the Law until after the Babylonian Exile and places the composition of the principal codes at the earliest after the great prophetical movement. Only the Book of the Covenant, and, possibly, the most ancient editing of the Yahwistic and Elohistic narrative sections could by this interpretation go back further than the eighth century. Instead of appearing as restorers of Mosaic monotheism, which the present order of the books of the Bible shows them to be, the prophets are represented as the first to build up and preach the idea.[22]

Much has been written on the history of the higher critical approach to the Old Testament.[23] In what follows we present only the necessary

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come late in Israel's history. On Hegelian principles such complex institutions were determined a priori to be a late stage of development. Wellhausen made no secret of his debt to Vatke. In the Prolegomena . . ., English trans., p. 13, he wrote that from Vatke "I gratefully acknowledge myself to have learnt best and most." On the whole question of the connection of Hegelianism and Vatke to Wellhausen's work see Lothar Perlitt, Vatke und Wellhausen (Berlin: Alfred Töpleman, 1965). The deleterious effect of Hegelianism on New Testament studies, especially through the work of D. F. Strauss, is well known but for a recent appreciative assessment of Strauss see Van A. Harvey, "D. F. Strauss' Life of Jesus Revisited," Church History, XXX (1961), 191-211.

[22]Quoted by Robert M. Grant, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), p. 162. The way in which this rewriting of history could appeal to the intellectual and spiritual temper of the age is nicely illustrated in these words of Otto Pfleiderer. In the traditional history of Israel ". . . we had from the beginning to end a series of riddles, of psychological and historical puzzles; here everything is comprehensible, we have a clear development analogous to the rest of history, . . . and though not an unbroken advance in a straight line of a whole people, still a laborious struggle of the representatives of the higher truth with the stolid masses, a struggle in which . . . even failure only serves to aid the evolution of the idea in ever greater purity from its original integuments. This is human history full of marvels and of Divine revelation, but nowhere interrupted by miracle or by sudden, unaccountable transitions." The Development of Theology in Germany Since Kant, trans. by J. Frederick Smith (London: S. Sonnenschein Co., 1890), p. 274.

[23]Hahn, op. cit. Emil G. Kraeling, The Old Testament Since the Reformation (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955). Hans Joachim Kraus, Geschichte der Historish-Kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart (Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins Neukirchen Kreis Moers, 1956).

background for understanding W. Robertson Smith.

Biblical critics attempted to use the tools developed by students of other ancient literatures in order to establish the circumstances of the origins of documents and to establish their meaning within the context of the author's or compiler's historical position.[24] This meant the Bible had to be evaluated not as a corpus of timeless truth let down from heaven but as an historically conditioned expression of human culture. Though a certain class of critics, of whom Robertson Smith is a fine example, would persist in regarding the Bible as a vehicle of divine revelation, they would nonetheless as critics have to view the Bible as a body of human literature amenable to the same canons of rational, historical enquiry as any secular documents. The critics could no longer accept at face value the plain statements given in the Biblical books as to their nature. By studying the incidental clues scattered in the texts, they sought rather to wring from the documents full confessions about the humility of their origins.

The Pentateuch was from the first the main theatre for the battles of higher criticism.[25] Until the late seventeenth century the tradition, amply supported by the Bible itself, that the Pentateuch was written by the historic Moses was all but universally accepted. The

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[24]On the similarities between the development of Homeric and Pentateuchal literary criticism in the nineteenth century see Edwin Yamauchi, Composition and Corroboration in Classical and Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966). In both Homeric and Pentateuchal studies analytical dissection of the text and skepticism as to the essential historicity of the traditions had to be reconsidered in light of the remarkable discoveries by archaeologists of Homeric and Biblical sites.

[25]Especially helpful in preparing the following overview was Julius Wellhausen's article "Hexateuch" in the Encyclopedia Biblica, ed. by T. K. Cheyne and J. S. Black (4 vols.; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1901), Vol. II, cols. 2045-2058.

first notable challenge to Mosaic authorship came from the pen of the Jewish philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza. In his Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (1670) he discussed several statements in the Pentateuch which seem anachronistic on the supposition of Mosaic authorship.[26] His conclusion was that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses but by one who lived many ages later, perhaps even the post-exilic scribe Ezra.[27]

The first effort to isolate particular documents within the Pentateuch was made by the French physician, Jean Astruc. Astruc advanced in his Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroit que Moyse s'est pour composer le livre de la Genèse (1753) the criterion of divine names as the key to the sources. By separating those episodes designating God by the Hebrew word Elohim from those in which He is called Jehovah (now more accurately spelled Yahweh but translated as Lord in the AV and RSV), Astruc found two parallel narratives within Genesis. By distinguishing the literary peculiarities of each of these sources subsequent scholars, most notably Johann Gottfried Eichhorn in his Einleitung (1780-83), claimed to find the hand of the Elohist and Jahwist throughout much of the rest of the Pentateuch.

The Book of Deuteronomy did not fit into this Jahwist-Elohist, or J-E, schema. Its place in the literary traditions of Israel was suggested by Wilhelm M. L. DeWette who in his Disertatio of 1805 established the hypothesis that Deuteronomy could be identified with the Book of the Law "found" in the Temple by the High Priest Hilikiah and

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[26] English trans. (London: Trubner & Co., 1862), p. 175.

[27] Ibid., pp. 183-84.

subsequently used as the basis for King Josiah's reformation of 621 B.C. (II Kings 22).

The next important step in Pentateuchal criticism came in 1853 when Herman Hupfeld demonstrated that the Elohist source was itself a composite document. One source, E^2, greatly resembled J in style, vocabulary, and subject matter while the rest of the E corpus, E^1 (what subsequent criticism called P), betrayed a priestly viewpoint. Indeed the bulk of the legal and cultic material of the central portion of the Pentateuch belonged to this older Elohist, Grundschrift, or Priestly Source. The consensus among a wide spectrum of critics by the 1860's was that four distinct sources could be isolated in the Pentateuch and that their relative chronological order was First Elohist or Priestly Source (P), Second Elohist (E), Jahwist (J), Deuteronomist (D).[28]

The truly revolutionary events in Pentateuchal studies occurred when what had been essentially literary study was coupled with a notion of the historical evolution of the law and cultus of ancient Israel. The outlines of the new theory, which we have above associated with the name Wellhausen, began to take shape in the 1860's through the efforts of several scholars.[29]

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[28]One can best appreciate the way in which this documentary hypothesis dissected the text, assigning even fragments of the same verse to different sources, by consulting a Bible in which the four sources are set out in parallel columns. See The Student's Old Testament, Charles Foster Kent (ed.), (6 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), Vol. I.

[29]Though the name of Karl Heinrich Graf is often associated with the first comprehensive effort to place the P document in a post-exilic context, he was in fact dependent on suggestions privately communicated to him by the Dutch scholar, Abraham Kuenen. "Most scholars in the seventies recognized [Kuenen] as a strong supporter of Graf, but apparently did not realize it was actually he who first proposed the

By placing the Pentateuchal documents isolated by literary methods in a new chronological order these scholars claimed to find a clear pattern of legal and liturgical evolution from patriarchal simplicity to post-exilic complexity. The materials in J-E were said to reflect a simple, non-priestly, decentralized form of religious life dating from before the seventh century.[30] Evidences were found in the historical books of Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings to substantiate this re-reading of history which of course denied to Moses the role assigned him unequivocally by the Pentateuch of one who promulgated the law of an elaborate religious cult. Deuteronomy, especially chapter 12, prescribes a single, central place for sacrificial worship. But in actual practice in the period of the Judges[31] and even under the Monarchy down to the time of Josiah (640-609 B.C.) there was a multiplicity of altars.[32]

In many ways the keystone to the development hypothesis was DeWette's identification of Deuteronomy with the Book of the Law found

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fully matured scheme. . . . Graf never got around to acknowledging his indebtedness to Kuenen. . . ." Simon J. Devries, "Hexateuchal Criticism of Kuenen," Journal of Biblical Literature, XXXII (1963), 31-57, p. 55. Kuenen traces the steps by which his own thinking and that of the whole consensus criticorum between 1860 and 1885 was converted to the view that the P document was the creation of the post-exilic priestly community in Abraham Kuenen, An Historico-Critical Inquiry into the Origin of the Hexateuch, trans. by Philip W. Wicksteed (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), pp. xi-xl.

[30] Exodus 20-23 was particularly urged as the legal and cultic code of ancient Israel.

[31] In the time of the Judges there were altars at Ophrah, Zorah, Shiloh, Bethel, Mizpah, and Dan.

[32] The recurrent lament of the Books of Kings is "the people still sacrificed at the high places." The prophet Elijah complained that the people had thrown down the altars of Jahweh. See I Kings 19:14.

in King Josiah's time. Only then, according to the theory, was a centralization of the cult undertaken. This Book of the Law was presumably concocted to serve the government's campaign of centralized control of religion.[33]

The full-blown pattern of worship commanded in the middle portion of the Pentateuch, the P material of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, with its elaborate forms of sacrifice officiated by a hierarchy of priests and Levites was the blueprint for the worship of the Jews of the post-exilic period. The detailed instructions given by Moses for the establishment of a tabernacle in the wilderness were in Wellhausen's phrase a "reflection backward" of cultic ideas that really arose only very late in Israel's history. P was then, in fact, the latest of the documents not the earliest as the previous generation had believed.

The prophets of the pre-exilic period, according to this schema, were ignorant of the "Mosaic" cult not because it had been forgotten by an apostate nation but because it had never existed.[34] The prophets of

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[33] A recent assessment of DeWette's theory finds it essentially correct with the reservation that Deuteronomy is not the pious forgery of Josiah's time but a pious "reworking" of very old materials to meet the demands of Josiah's age. Moshe Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy--The Present State of the Inquiry," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXXVI (1967), 249-62. Very similar is the position of E. W. Nicholson, Deuteronomy and Tradition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

[34] Though the case was largely built on the argument from silence there are occasional passages in the prophets that seem to give support to the critic's position. Strongest of these is Jeremiah 7:22. "For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices." How this verse can be understood on the now more common supposition of the antiquity of the Mosaic laws of sacrifice is explained by H. H. Rowley, The Unity of the Bible (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 46-47, and Oswald T. Allis, The Five Books of Moses (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1943), pp. 168-71.

the eighth and seventh centuries rather than Moses were given the major role in first teaching "ethical monotheism."[35] The ethical preaching of the prophets and the priestly traditions of the Old Testament were seen as two antithetical strands of religious development.[36]

The great exilic prophet, Ezekiel, however, was assigned a key role in the formulation of the priestly laws of sacrificial worship. His program for the restored community (Ezekiel 40-48) served as a transitional factor in moving toward the codification of the legal and cultic prescriptions of P.[37] Ezra, so ran the theory, first promulgated the whole "Law of Moses" in the post-exilic community.[38]

Such in outline was the "Wellhausenian" reconstruction of Old Testament history.[39] Though both the documentary and developmental

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[35]The Mosaic origin of ethical monotheism has been strongly championed of late by W. F. Albright and his school. See the section captioned "Moses and Monotheism" in Albright's From the Stone Age to Christianity, 2nd ed.,(Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), pp. 257-72.

[36]"The cultus is the heathen element in Israelite religion. . . . If the Priestly Code makes the cultus the principal thing, that appears to amount to a systematic decline into heathenism which the prophets incessantly combated and yet were unable to eradicate." Wellhausen, Prolegomena . . ., Eng. trans., pp. 422-23.

[37]Ibid., p. 421. The most compelling line of evidence for the priority of Ezekiel to P was that Ezekiel drew a sharp distinction between priests and Levites on the basis that the Levites had led the people into idol worship. He therefore demoted their role in the post-exilic temple to that of servants to the priests. The Sons of Zadok, a single branch of the Levitical line, retained the right to draw near to God as priests (Ez. 44). Since the distinction between priest and Levite was a tacit assumption of P it must, so it was argued, be subsequent to Ezekiel.

[38]Ibid., p. 405.

[39]The most influential popularizations in English of this general reconstruction were William Robertson Smith, The Old Testament and the Jewish Church (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1881), and

aspects of the theory were fraught with difficulties from the beginning,[40] it has nevertheless exercised a remarkable hold over Old Testament scholarship. Only in recent decades have studies of the historical and philological materials obtained by archaeology begun to discredit the central tenets of the theory.[41]

Samuel Rolles Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891). Driver was strongly influenced in the development of his views by Robertson Smith. They became friends when Smith joined the Old Testament Revision Company in 1874. Driver's biographer wrote that "Smith's boldness and originality combined with great learning and breadth of view, were a valuable stimulus, and did much to determine the course of Driver's subsequent development. . . . The Revision continued till 1884, and it was this experience together with his association with Robertson Smith, which more than anything else decided his exclusive devotion to biblical criticism." Driver succeeded Pusey in 1884 as Regius Professor of Hebrew. A. Cowley, "Samuel Rolles Driver," Proceedings of the British Academy (1915-16), pp. 540-44. That Driver was for some time no blind follower of Smith or of Wellhausen is indicated by the letter he wrote to Smith after the appearance of The Old Testament in the Jewish Church. "I entirely agree with you that real discoveries respecting the O. T. are a gain and in no way impair its claim to be regarded as the true preparation for Christianity; but I cannot yet satisfy myself that all the views of Wellhausen are real discoveries; many seem to be more conjectures, which ought not to be put forward and reasoned upon as facts. Nor can I persuade myself that the result of two probabilities each say, 1/2, or of three, each = 1/3, one depending on the other can be a certainty; yet this is hardly a caricature of the confident manner in which the conclusion of a series of assumptions is sometimes announced." Smith MSS, 7449-4. But note the way Driver almost inverts this argument in the 1897 preface to his Introduction . . . "The method pursued has thus often been to assume (on grounds not fully stated, but which have satisfied the author) the conclusion to be established, and to point to particular salient facts, which exemplify it or presuppose its truth. The argument in the majority of cases is cumulative--a species of argument which is often both the strongest and also the most difficult to exhaust within reasonable compass." P. iv.

[40] Scholarly and popular opposition to this reconstruction of Old Testament history as it centered around Smith's exposition of it will be treated in the following chapter.

[41] In the nineteenth century almost without exception opposition emmanated from theologically conservative quarters, though it could be none the less cogent for the fact. Today men by no means opposed on theological grounds to a radically critical version of Israel's history have found "Wellhausenism" untenable on scientific grounds. Archaeology

The Progress of Smith's Thought, 1870-75

William Robertson Smith embarked on his career as a professional theologian in the middle of what has been called the most revolutionary decade in the history of Old Testament scholarship. He was at first by no means sympathetic to the new views gaining way on the continent through the efforts of Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen. In his early lectures and publications he defended a comparatively conservative position and formulated several cogent objections to the same views he later espoused himself. Inasmuch as he was destined to become the leading English scholar to first expound and defend the revolutionary theories of Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen it will be our purpose to throw as much light as possible on the transition Smith made between 1870 and 1875.

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has done much to vindicate the historicity and antiquity of the Pentateuchal materials. See William Foxwell Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity. The discovery in 1928 of the Ras Shamra tablets which made apparent a wealth of parallels between ancient Canaanite culture and the supposedly late P materials have forced a wholesale reconsideration of the J, E, D, P chronology. As one writer put it "Israelite history can no longer be made to climb the three flight staircase of Wellhausen's Hegelian Reconstruction." Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Priestly Tabernacle," The Biblical Archaeologist Reader, eds. G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), pp. 203-04. But while a growing consensus finds the developmental hypothesis of the older criticism untenable there is still a wide adherence to the documentary hypothesis. As George Mendenhall has written, "The classical sources, J, E, D, P described by Wellhausen and others, are still generally accepted by most scholars. . . . It is not generally understood, however, outside the circle of a few specialists at least, that the reconstruction of the history of Israel and its religion which Wellhausen carried out on the foundation of his literary analysis, has almost entirely broken down. . . ." "Biblical History in Transition," The Bible and the Ancient Near East, ed. by George Ernest Wright (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), p. 29. Though as Mendenhall says most Old Testament scholars continue to use the J, E, D, P sigla, recognizing that these "sources" contain materials of greater antiquity than was once suspected, there are some few who, defying critical convention, reject even the hallowed analysis of the

That there was a transition cannot be doubted nor in a scholar as young and as diligent in research as Smith should a change of perspectives be surprising. Black and Chrystal, however, by-pass the bulk of Smith's scholarship in this critical period with the words "his early tentative views need not detain us."[42] Another writer makes the wholly unfounded claim that the "Bible" article did not contain anything Smith had not been teaching for six years as a professor.[43] We have the testimony of Julius Wellhausen, however, that when he first made Smith's acquaintance in 1871 he was not yet, as he would so often be called subsequently, a "Wellhausenian." "In our conversation," wrote Wellhausen, "he opposed my views with vigor."[44] Students, too, have remembered the essentially conservative tenor of much that their professor had to say.[45]

Pentateuch into J, E, D, and P. Working largely on the internal difficulties raised in the text itself to such analysis are Umberto Cassuto, The Documentary Hypothesis (English edition, 1961; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press) and Allis, op. cit. The difficulties raised for J, E, D, P by a comparative study of Old Testament literary forms and those of contemporaneous extra-Biblical literature are treated by Kenneth Kitchen, Ancient Orient and Old Testament (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966). So entrenched is documentary orthodoxy that even such impressive scholarship as Kitchen's seems unlikely to wean many from their J, E, D, P "commitment." It has become, as Cyrus Gordon complained "the badge of interconfessional academic respectability" which is perpetuated in the Biblical scholarship of the present day only by "a perverse miracle." See Cyrus H. Gordon, "Higher Critics and Forbidden Fruit," Christianity Today, IV (1959), 131-34.

[42] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 134.

[43] Donald Carswell, Brother Scots (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1927), p. 77.

[44] Quoted in John F. White and William Duguid Geddes, Two Professors of Oriental Languages (Aberdeen: University Press, 1899), p.33.

[45] As one former student wrote: "His critical position was at first somewhat conservative; thus he lectured on Egypt and the Books of Moses, . . . maintaining the antiquity of the Joseph narratives. But

What distinguished Smith in 1870 from many of his colleagues was his willingness to seriously entertain critical theories. By virtue of the theological reorientation he had experienced under the influence of Kant, Rothe, and Ritschl he was free to treat the Bible as a fallible witness to revelation. But only gradually did Smith become convinced of the correctness of a particular critical hypothesis accounting for the history behind this record.

In attempting to trace the movement of Smith's thought toward a particular school of higher criticism we must pause to look at one of the first of several occasions when he attempted to establish in the eyes of his colleagues the abstract validity of the critical method in Christian use of the Bible. The occasion was his inauguration as a professor of the Free Church of Scotland. Under the title "What History Teaches Us to Seek in the Bible," Smith viewed the issues in a context calculated to appeal to the deepest sympathies of his audience.[46] He sought to vindicate a hermeneutic which unfeignedly availed itself of the critical method by suggesting that nothing less than a choice

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he was of course in advance of current Free Church opinion, and did not even at first take all his students with him. Strictly conservative views were then powerfully represented in the Aberdeen College." British Weekly, XV (5 April 1894).

It was in the summer of 1870 following his election that Smith began to appear quite frequently as a guest preacher in Free Church pulpits. This was expected of a theological professor and Smith ably fulfilled the responsibility until he was removed from his Chair a decade later. Numerous meticulously written notes for these pulpit appearances are extant in the Smith MSS. They reveal without exception a man who preached a simple, Biblical, evangelical doctrine. He never seems to have brought higher criticism or theological speculation into the pulpit. Indeed even when his notoriety began to attract large crowds of the curious, they were almost disappointed with the "old-fashioned evangelicalism of his sermons." Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 124.

[46] The lecture is published in Lectures and Essays, pp. 207-34.

between Protestant and Roman conceptions of the Christian religion was entailed. Nor in setting Reformation and pre-Reformation hermeneutical principles in contrast was Smith dealing with a matter of purely antiquarian interest. The allegorical and typological approaches to Scripture which Smith associated with the patristic and medieval Church were by no means unpracticed in his own communion.[47]

To demonstrate a continuity between Christ and the Old Testament has ever been a challenge to the Christian scholar. The typological and allegorical response to this challenge attempted to discover in the persons and events of the Old Testament prophetical adumbrations of the Person of Christ and mystical anticipations of the doctrine and practice of the Church. Thus such heroes of the old covenant as Joseph and David were said to be types of Christ. The details of the Mosaic Tabernacle and Aaronic priesthood were believed to foreshadow truths which became fully manifest only in New Testament doctrine.[48] Bible study of this sort attracted a great deal of attention in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly in circles like Smith's

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[47]The standard work on the subject was by Patrick Fairbairn, Smith's counterpart at the Free Church College, Glasgow. Fairbairn's Typology, a tome of 500 pages, was in its fifth edition in 1870.

In recounting some of his son's youthful observations about Scripture, Rev. Smith revealed that William was an adept practitioner of the art of finding allegories. But no doubt he was really imitating his father's style of exegesis when at the age of ten he said such things as: "There is a strange thing in that verse: 'I am black but comely.' [Said by the Shulammite maid to her lover in Song of Solomon 1:5.] It seems Christ's people have done many sins--but yet they are comely in His sight. Justification is an Act of God's free grace. . . . They are black in themselves but righteous in Christ's righteousness." "Father's Memorandum," Smith MSS, 7476-6. One of the eight charges brought against Smith in the first trial was his repudiation of the allegorical use of the Song of Solomon.

[48]On the higher critical view of the priestly-Levitical law and its negative implications for a typological approach to the Old Testament forms of worship see J. Estlin Carpenter, The Bible in the Nineteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903), pp. 98-154.

much affected by the Evangelical Revival.[49] In Smith's opinion there had been a defection from the superior hermeneutics of the Reformers and a return among so-called Protestants to an essentially pre-Reformation use of the Bible. It was a mode of interpretation completely alien to the critico-historical method.[50] Therefore, Smith's lesson in history had an immediate relevance, however obliquely stated.

In his address Smith asserted that the post-apostolic church down to the time of the Reformation was captive to an allegorical exegesis and a concommitant "neonomian" theology which made Christianity

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[49] See the evidence cited by A. R. Darbyshire, "Typology," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. by James Hastings, XII (1908), p. 503.

[50] "The rise of modern critical study broke the chain of continuity which had hitherto existed between the modern reader and his medieval and early Christian predecessors. . . . A common belief linked the authors of the New Testament books with their readers. This was the conviction which they shared: that the whole Bible spoke directly of Christ, in prophecy, type, and allegory so far as the Old Testament is concerned, and the consequent belief that the historical context of a passage and the immediate attention which the original author had in writing in the circumstances of his own time were of relatively minor importance. . . . Historical and literary criticism took the opposite view, . . . Biblical criticism sought to recover the true and original meaning of the literal sense and to set the various documents comprising the Bible in their proper context in history instead of seeing them as fixed unalterably in a divinely planned mosaic pattern of Holy Scripture. . . . This was the most important as well as the most profoundly revolutionary effect of the 'higher criticism.'" G. W. H. Lampe, "The Reasonableness of Typology," Essays on Typology, Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 22 (Naperville: Alec Allenson, 1957), pp. 14-16. There has been a tendency in recent years to question the full adequacy of the "historical approach" to do justice to the Biblical materials and to, therefore, reassess the cautious use of typology. Lampe's essay is an expression of this trend. See also A. C. Charity, Events and Their Afterlife: The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante (Cambridge: University Press, 1966). A balanced discussion of the whole problem is Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, Rev. Ed. (Boston: A. W. Wilde, 1956), esp. Chap. IX.

an abstract system of intellectual truths to be believed.[51] The defective hermeneutic and defective theology were coordinate products of the impact on Christianity of Hellenic philosophy with its one-sided exaltation of the eternal and unchangeable at the expense of the historical. The Fathers from Origen, through Jerome and Augustine, to Aquinas had lost the apostolic sense of the organic and truely historical connection between the two testaments.

> They approached the Old Testament (which you must remember was, until the formation of the New Testament Canon, Scripture in an exclusive sense) with no further guide than the general principle that Christ and Christian truth was everywhere the true substance of what they read. Reading mainly with a view to practical edification and purposes of exhortation, they were content to believe that they had understood a passage so soon as they could in any way detect in it a meaning that bore on Christian truth or Christian life. What the Scriptures had taught to the men of the old covenant it was not necessary to ask; God's meaning at least is unchangeable, and that meaning is revealed in Christ. That in the Old Testament, for pedagogic ends, the eternal truth was wrapped up in obscure forms, seemed a matter of no special interest to Christians; their business was only to pierce through the letter to the spirit that lay within, and which was precisely the same as the spiritual truth of the New Testament, both in the intention of the inspiring Spirit and in the apprehension of the inspired writer. You see that this theory is intelligible only on the supposition that the essence of Christianity lies in a series of formulae expressing eternal abstract truths or unchanging principles of morality, which before the time of Christ were obscurely revealed, but which He, in His quality of the great Prophet and Lawgiver of His people, set forth clearly.
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> These and similar utterances ascribe to Scripture not less, but more than its due; for they give to an intellectual assent to the doctrines of Scripture the power to mould man's life without any direct personal relation to Christ. More or less unambiguously they make Scripture not an avenue to approach to Christ, but in an by itself a Divine phenomenon magically endued in every letter with saving treasures of wisdom and knowledge.[52]

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[51] It should be noted (for it was not by Smith) that the use of type and allegory is confirmed by the New Testament itself. See for instance Paul's words in Galatians 4:21-24 or the Epistle to the Hebrews, especially chapters 8 and 9.

[52] Lectures and Essays, pp. 212-13, 215. That Smith failed to do justice to the multiversity and richness of pre-Reformation exegesis

The Reformation of the sixteenth century, argued Smith, was a return to an historical hermeneutic and therefore to a theology that gave faith and revelation a personal character. The issue at the outset of the Reformation was not the opposition of Scripture and Tradition. Both Luther and his opponents accepted the ultimate authority of the Bible. The question was one of how Scripture was to be interpreted; whether in Luther's words by using the Word of God "like a sow with a bag of oates" or whether according to more historical and spiritual principles.

> That Scripture was God's Word all were agreed. The medieval Church, understanding by God's Word an intellectual revelation, looked in Scripture for that alone, and where no intellectual mysteries appeared, saw only, as Luther complains, bare dead histories, "which had simply taken place, and concerned men no more." Not so the Reformers. If God's Word is the opening up of what is in God's heart, the declaration of the eternal love in which alone man can rest, the story of God's dealings with the believers of bygone days can never become a dead history. "Let no pious Christian," says Luther in the Preface to his German Bible, "stumble at the simple Word and Story that meet him so often in Scripture. Nay, let him not doubt that, plain as they seem, they are the very Words, Works Judgments, and History of God's high Majesty, Might, and Wisdom." Or again, in his exposition of Genesis, he shows that the Bible history is a sacred history, because God's Word gleams forth in it. All history shows the great works of God; but the great pre-eminence of Bible history is that in it God speaks.[53]

The historic record, understood in a literal sense, contains the Word of God, "not a body of abstract truth, but the living, personal history of God's gracious dealings from age to age." But then in Luther's phrase "the one single, simple, sense" of Scripture would do. No overstrained typology or allegory was desirable. But to understand God's personal encounter in history with His people the exegete must

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will be readily seen by consulting a work such as Robert M. Grant, op. cit., pp. 57-127.

[53] Lectures and Essays, p. 228.

place himself in the historical context of the first hearers. This is the point, said Smith, where the teaching of the Reformers and the program of the higher critics were one in the same.

> It is impossible to pass from this topic without in one word pointing out that a necessary consequence of this way of treating the Bible is the honest practice of a higher criticism. The higher criticism does not mean negative criticism. It means the fair and honest looking at the Bible as a historical record, and the effort everywhere to reach the real meaning and historical setting not of individual passages of the Scripture, but of the Scripture Records as a whole; and to do this we must apply the same principle that the Reformation applied to detail Exegesis. We must let the Bible speak for itself. Our notion of the origin, the purpose, the character of the Scripture must be drawn, not from vain traditions, but from a historical study of the books themselves. This process can be dangerous to faith only when it is begun without faith--when we forget that the Bible history is no profane history, but the story of God's saving self-manifestation.[54]

This vindication of the right of criticism offered on the occasion of Smith's inauguration as a theological professor need not lead us to conclude that he already in 1870 held the opinions on particular critical questions for which he was later noted. Between the statement of the abstract right of criticism and the espousal of a particular critical theory there is a great difference. Smith only gradually and evidently with considerable hesitation worked his way toward the infamous "Wellhausenian" theory of Old Testament religion.

The main sources of information relating to this question prior to the publication of the Encyclopedia Britannica article "Bible" in December, 1875, are the lecture notes and the several published book reviews deriving from the years 1870-75. From these sources we can document a rather marked hostility on Smith's part to the very theories he later advocated and the simultaneous growth of doubt about more

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[54] Ibid., pp. 232-33.

conventional views as his acquaintance increased with the whole literature of higher criticism. The publication of "Bible" as one writer puts it "not in a fugitive journal but in a work intended to record conclusions which had been definitely reached,"[55] thrust upon Smith the necessity of choosing his side. But right up until the eve of the publication of this article a marked ambivalence in his thought is evident.

In the course of each academic year Smith delivered a series of lectures for senior students on some aspect of the Old Testament. In 1870-71 he treated prophecy as a general phenomenon of Israelitic religion. In 1871-72 he concerned himself with the poetry and Psalms of the Old Testament. In 1872-73 he delivered a course of lectures which he entitled "The Sacred Worship and Liturgical Antiquities of Israel." Only a few isolated lectures for the 1873-74 session have survived and he seems to have been concerned again with the Psalms. Unfortunately materials for 1874-75, which should be the most interesting year for our present concern, are entirely lacking. In 1875-76 Smith reworked the cycle of lectures on the prophets first written in 1870-71.

Most of the surviving lecture notes are models of scholarship. Each lecture was written out in a meticulous hand and gives evidence of the care with which Smith polished his thoughts and weighed his words. The bibliographical notes show Smith's acquaintance with both the older and newer literature on each problem he broached. However, a reading of this entire body of manuscript material leads to the generalization that despite Smith's frequent rhetoric on the theory and method of

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[55]Norman L. Walker, Chapters in the History of the Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1895), p. 273.

higher criticism he had surprisingly little to say about many of the concrete problems. He occasionally offered a discussion of the date or authorship of some prophecy or psalm but he was surprisingly reticent about that most elemental issue, the composition of the Pentateuch. He seems never to have gone into Pentateuchal source analysis in any systematic way with his students. There are, however, some occasional references pertaining to Pentateuchal criticism and to these we must turn for a measure of light.

When he wanted to illustrate the untenability of a "radical critical theory" Abraham Kuenen's De Godsdienst van Israel was his foil. The scholar he quoted most frequently in a positive, appreciative, manner was Heinrich Ewald. In the 1870's Ewald was no longer considered an advanced critic. He had held that the Priests' Code was the earliest stratum of the Pentateuch and afforded a sound historical core for studying the work of Moses.[56] In his first series of lectures on the institution of prophecy Smith followed Ewald in devoting a lengthy section (largely expurgated from the 1876 revision) to the role of Moses as a prophet of Jahweh. He concluded his discussion with these words (also later deleted): "These considerations not only serve to show that Moses was a real person (now not denied) but are part of

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[56] "To read Ewald is to measure the enormous distance that separates the middle from the end of the nineteenth century. In the first place, his narrative is drawn exclusively from the Old Testament itself. . . . Secondly, the Jews are throughout the Chosen People. . . . Finally, he had no suspicion of the late date of the law." Wellhausen said of him, "'He was the great holder-up, who by his authority prevented a true interpretation of Jewish history being accepted.'" Pfleiderer said he retarded Biblical criticism by a generation. G. P. Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century (2nd ed.; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913), p. 523.

the many proofs that the subsequent history is only intelligible on the supposition that his work is such as the Torah describes to us."[57]

His lectures of 1872-73 on Israelitic liturgy were of necessity concerned primarily with the Pentateuch but there was comparatively little discussion of critical theory in reference to it. He made no attempt to place the material in an evolutionary context, but he did lay considerable emphasis on the correspondence between Old Testament institutions properly understood and the doctrines of evangelical Protestants. There were, however, several passages discussing the untenability of a late date for the Priest's Code. For instance, he gave a brief resumé of the argument for a late date for P and then went on to say:

> From these facts some critics have sought to draw the conclusion that the altar privileges of the Levitical priesthood was a later deflection from the original state of things, and that accordingly the not inconsiderable portions of the O. T. which discuss or exemplify the privileges of the priests are the product of priestcraft and clerical fraud.
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> Such a view is however radically untenable. It must be remembered that from the first the unity of the nation was essentially one of religion. When released from this bond of fellowship tribal feeling always proved much stronger than national sentiment. Even Jereboam we know found that his one great difficulty lay in the temple worship. . . . When he had provided a new sanctuary he had no fear that political grounds would draw his people to Jerusalem. . . . Thus even from a purely human point of view it is incredible that Moses should have failed to set up a central cultus in the interest of religious unity by which alone the people could be bound together. On the general principle of giving concrete ritual expression to all religious facts Moses must have made provision for the exercise of a continuous national worship in a central sanctuary. For so long as worship was distributed over the old

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[57] "The Prophetic Work of Moses and the Name JHWH" (1870-71), Smith MSS. Similarly in October, 1872, Smith wrote, "It would be a mistake to suppose with the extreme negative school that it is apriori certain that any view of Israel's history which supposes a large agreement between the ordinances of Moses and Ezra must be false." "The Sacred Worship and Liturgical Antiquities of Israel," Fas. I, Smith MSS.

> patriarchal holy places, so long as there were only such occasional sacrifices as a private Israelite or tribal priest of the pre-Mosaic kind could perform the religion of Israel was quite sure to become subordinant to local jealousies and prejudices and ultimately to degenerate into heathenism. . . . The priesthood of Aaron is fully explicable from ideas that must be as old as Moses, and that historically the Ark which is certainly as old as Moses demanded a special priesthood--the priesthood namely of Aaron and his sons. And of course wherever a regular priesthood arises it follows that the laity are sharply excluded from the priestly functions. Outside of the central sanctuary many relics of patriarchal cultus might remain. . . . But in the tabernacle service the priests must possess and assert strict ceremonial laws. And so we do not find there is any trace of the people who went up to the central sanctuary acting independently of the priests. I am unable to find that even Solomon while conducting the inauguration of the Temple violated the priestly privilege by any personal contact with the altar or the Ark. Thus it was an absolute innovation and rightly withstood by the priests when Uzziah (II Chronicles 26:16) ventured to enter the holy place to offer incense.[58]

But in this view how will the anomalies pointed out by the critics in Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings be accounted for? Smith here used the favorite argument of his latter-day enemies, that there was a survival of pre-Mosaic usage, that the Law of Moses was only imperfectly kept from the first. But Smith couched his thought in the au courant phrases of the day. With the Semites as with other peoples ancient and modern, said Smith:

> The forms and habits of national life are not mere artificial and positive institutions to be moulded at will but parts of an organic growth which are susceptible only of organic change. . . . It is plain that the ordinances of the Pentateuch, our chief source for most parts of Hebrew archaeology, cannot in such a people have succeeded in wholly obliterating older usage. Nor is it credible that Moses entertained so impracticable a design. In some measure his laws incorporated ancient usage; and in others the old usage still toughly held its own despite the new law. Hence it is often incorrect to assume that the law as it stands in the Pentateuch is the key to all usages mentioned in the historical books. On the contrary, various streams sometimes of local and tribal usage, sometimes of earlier universal customs, run side by side with the theocratic legislation through a great part of the history of Israel.[59]

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[58] Ibid., Fas. IV. Italics mine. [59] Ibid., Fas. I.

As to Kuenen's argument that the priestly hierarchy is a late development, the right of every man to offer his own sacrifice being only gradually extinguished in Israel's national life, Smith found it untenable. "This theory," he wrote, "implies a very sweeping negation of the historicity of the Pentateuch and other parts of the Old Testament."[60] If the critics can cite cases where non-priestly, non-Aaronoide, persons perform sacrifice (II Samuel 6:17,18; II Samuel 8:18), Smith had a ready answer.

> David, when the Ark is brought to Jerusalem appears in priestly guise, sacrifices and imparts to the people a priestly blessing. . . . His sons are called priests though it is not clear how far this involves the performance of actual priestly functions. No doubt in the case of David and his sons it must be remembered that a peculiar sanctity attached to the consecrated theocratic Ruler--the annointed of JHWH; so that he might retain longer than the people at large something of the patriarchal privileges of Melchizedek.[61]

But near the end of this course of lectures Smith made a statement which indicates his growing dissatisfaction with the adequacy of

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[60] Ibid., Fas. IV.

[61] Ibid. This is one of the several passages that it is most instructive to see Smith handling a decade later in his book, The Old Testament in the Jewish Church (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1881), where we read on pp. 264-65, "According to the Law, the consecration of the Priesthood is not of man but of God. . . . The popular religion has another view. To offer sacrifice is the privilege of every Israelite. . . . In this respect David was not more orthodox than Saul. When he brought up the ark to Jerusalem he wore a priestly ephod, offered sacrifices in person, and, to make it quite clear that in all this he assumed a priestly function, he blessed the people as a priest in the name of Jehovah (II Sam. vi. 14,18). Nor were these irregularities exceptional; in II Sam. viii. 18 we read that David's sons were priests. This statement, so incredible on the traditional theory, has led our English version, following the Jewish tradition of the Targum, to change the sense and substitute 'chief rulers' for priests. But the Hebrew word means priests and can mean nothing else. Equally irregular was David's relation to the high places." And so on he went, tactfully ignoring his own counter-arguments of an earlier day.

such defensive arguments. He was about to discuss the place of the ark of the covenant in Israel's early worship. He prefaced his lecture with these words:

> You may probably be inclined to think that before anything of the history of the ark should go the description of the tabernacle in which the ark was preserved. A few years ago this would have been the natural course to follow. But in recent times the historicity of the tabernacle as described in Exodus has been exposed to severe assaults which do not touch the historicity of the ark.[62]

Smith did not deal with these difficulties. He simply ignored the tabernacle and made the ark the center of the cultus until the building of the temple. In this same section he alluded to certain disputed points pertaining to the Levitical priesthood which he promised to treat fully at some future date.[63]

In 1871 Smith became the regular reviewer of works in Dutch theology for the British and Foreign Evangelical Review. This journal from its inception had been largely concerned with combating continental infidelity. Ironically it became one of the chief means by which knowledge of higher criticism was disseminated in Great Britain.[64] In the six years of his affiliation with this journal Smith wrote some thirty review articles. Many of them were matter-of-fact and uncontroversial in tone. But several written before 1876 were distinctly unsympathetic to critical theories which Smith later championed. The chief object of

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[62] Ibid., Fas. VII. Smith had lined out "at the present moment" in preference for the words "in recent times" in the last quoted sentence. That it was for Smith a concern of the "moment" was probably closer to the truth, but he evidently and understandably did not want to convey this to his students.

[63] In a marginal note Smith cited passages in works by Graf, Nöldeke, and Kuenen as the sources of thesenew difficulties.

[64] Glover, op. cit., p. 41.

Smith's criticism was the Leiden school of theology, rallying point for the Dutch modernist movement.[65] The leading spirits behind this theological departure were J. H. Scholten, C. W. Opzoomer, and A. Kuenen. Their chief organ was the Theologische Tijdschrift, founded in 1866. In his first review Smith characterized the posture of this Dutch journal as follows:

> The organ of the "Leiden" or "modern" School of Dutch Theology enters its fifth year without diminution in scientific activity and zeal which claim our respect but also without modification of the extremely rationalistic principles which separate it from our sympathy. In every page of the Tijdschrift we feel ourselves face to face with men to whom theology is a matter not of the Church, but of the School; and Christianity itself, not the principle of a new life, but an affair of religious philosophy. A theology that springs from such principles is, of course, uncompromisingly radical. But the real merit of the school is just that its radicalness is openly avowed. There is no pretense of absolute impartiality in the discussion of theological topics. The criticism, in particular, of the Biblical records, to which a great part of the strength of the school is directed, has for its avowed end the explanation of the religious ideas and progress of the Old and New Testament, in accordance with a theory of the philosophy of religion that refuses to see a difference in kind between Christianity and other religions of the world. . . . We decline to believe we and the men of the Theologische Tijdschrift are really fellow workers on one scientific edifice. It is absurd to ask for scientific fellowship where there are radically opposite aims.[66]

In this same review Smith went on to treat of a member of this opprobrious school with whom he later had the closest of intellectual fellowship. In recent articles in the Tijdschrift Abraham Kuenen had been raising historical objections to the patriarchal narratives. Smith summarized the arguments and found them completely lacking in force.

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[65] For the history of which see Eldred Cornelius Vanderlaan, Protestant Modernism in Holland (London: Oxford University Press, 1924).

[66] William Robertson Smith, "Dutch Periodicals," British and Foreign Evangelical Review, XX (1871), 579-80.

"Surely if Kuenen would have us give up the historicity of the Patriarchs he must give us more than this."[67] In successive issues for the next four years Smith maintained this antagonistic stance toward the Dutch liberals.[68] These contributions to the British and Foreign Evangelical Review are worthy of note primarily because they are in marked contrast to views Smith held later. But this is not to say by any means that Smith was an obscurantist or wholly unprogressive. There were already many points of disagreement between him and the majority of his Free Church brethren and to be sure he used the pages of the Review to promote his own Rotheian, mediating theology.[69] But one would not suspect that the author of these review articles was the man soon to be known as the leading English speaking champion of the radical reconstruction of Israelitic history so closely associated with the name Abraham Kuenen.

In the October 1875 issue the British and Foreign Evangelical Review published a long review of Kuenen's The Religion of Israel to the Fall of the Jewish State. It is difficult to understand how this article could have been written by Smith in the same year that he wrote

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[67] Ibid., pp. 582-84.

[68] Good examples of his general indictment of both their Biblical scholarship and general philosophy of religion will be found under "Dutch Periodicals," British and Foreign Evangelical Review, XXII (1873), 175-79, and XXIII (1874), 789-93. In the latter he wrote, "Young men in Holland who fall under the influence of the modern school are in a large proportion of cases alienated from theology altogether and the school at the moment of its highest triumph seems likely to die for want of disciples."

[69] See especially his review of The Hebrew Prophets, vol. II, by Rowland Williams and The Minor Prophets, vol. IV, by E. B. Pusey, XX (1871), 596-99.

"Bible." The writer questioned practically every proposition of the developmental theory of Israel's religion. For instance, on the crucial matter of a Josianic date for the Book of Deuteronomy he wrote: "We shall just call attention to his discussion of the reign of Josiah, where he locates the production of Deuteronomy, and seems to be unconscious how incompatible his two pictures are--on the one hand the noble, pious, spirit that could inspire such a movement and on the other hand the petty plotting, lying, and deception to which he ascribes its success." We can only conclude that if Smith wrote this review, as seems probable, he was unconvinced as late as mid-1875 about the tenability of the position he found himself championing in 1876.[70]

Smith's Encyclopedia Britannica Article "Bible"

Before turning to the article "Bible" a few additional comments about Smith's life between 1870 and 1875 are in order. A thorough history of his involvements in Aberdeen society and of his extensive continental travels can be found elsewhere[71] and a perusal of his bibliography for the years in question will reveal that we have by no means exhausted

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[70]This review in the British and Foreign Evangelical Review, XXIV (1875), 781-85, was unsigned. The following considerations lead me to attribute it to Smith: He was still at the time the regular reviewer of Dutch theology. (He did not sever his ties with the Review until 1877.) It was not inconsistent with the view of Kuenen he had previously taken in the pages of this journal. Both Black and Chrystal and Jesse H. Brown include it in their bibliographies under Smith's name. Since the article "Bible" was in preparation during the summer of 1875, it is possible that the MSS of this review had been completed for some time before its publication in October. Smith was well acquainted with the Dutch original of Kuenen's work and may even have written the review sometime before the appearance of the English translation in three volumes in 1874-75.

[71]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 123-78.

the reaches of his scholarly output in the discussion above. Since his teaching duties occupied him but five months of the year Smith had ample time to indulge his appetite for pure scholarship. With the exception of 1870, when the Franco-Prussian war prevented it, Smith was able to spend part of every year on the continent in contact with theologians and orientalists.[72] These visits no doubt proved as decisive in their way on Smith's thought as similar trips did in his student years. Of particular importance for his subsequent career was the study of Arabic under Paul de Lagarde of Göttingen. The knowledge thus acquired greatly facilitated, indeed rendered possible, Smith's researches into comparative religion.

When in 1874 the editor of the projected ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica was looking for the right scholar to write several articles pertaining to Biblical subjects, Smith was a ready choice. His reputation in both scientific and theological work was now established. His numerous reviews and articles in the British and Foreign Evangelical Review and elsewhere had demonstrated not only his thorough knowledge of modern Biblical scholarship but also his sense of caution and discrimination, requisite qualities in a contributor to the

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[72]The Franco-Prussian War was one of the few political events about which Smith has left a record of his personal feelings. Writing to J. S. Black on 11 August 1870 he said: "I think it would not be fair to Deutschland to which we both owe such a debt of gratitude not to chime in audibly in your exultation over the prospect of France getting a proper thrashing. I never have doubted that Prussia would gain in the end and now things look as if she would gain at once. I can't but think that this war is the gegenstück of the Thirty Years War. That war broke up Germany and ended the advance of the Reformation. This will unite Germany and unite it as a Protestant power. I think it is a striking providence that has brought it together with the Infallibility Decree." Smith MSS, 7449-5.

Britannica. So it was that Smith contracted to write articles under the titles "angel," "apostle," "Aramaic Language," "Ark of the Covenant," "Assideans," "Baal," and "Bible." The appearance in due time of the first six evoked for the moment no adverse comment. It was the publication on December 7, 1875, of Volume III with its fifteen page article "Bible" that touched off the cause celebre of nineteenth century higher criticism.

The article was divided into two main parts relating to the Old and New Testaments respectively. In addition to the standard information about the transmission of the text and translation of the several versions, Smith provided an account of the historical origins of the diverse literary materials that constitute the two Testaments. While in the eyes of his accusers the New Testament section would not be found above reproach it was sufficiently harsh on the Tübingen school to show that Smith was less tainted by avant garde theory in his New Testament scholarship than he was in his conception of the Older Testament. It is with the latter that we shall have to be most concerned in what follows.

Unfortunately for Smith some prefatory remarks to his article were editorially deleted before publication. In this section he had distinguished between the theological and the historical approaches to Scripture and had granted the validity and distinct prerogatives of each. Ideas with which we are now already familiar were again succinctly stated.

> The Bible may be viewed either from a purely theological standpoint (as is done in the dogmatic system), or from the standpoint of literary and historical criticism. The two views are not mutually exclusive, though theology has sometimes formulated the divine authority of Scripture in a way that excludes all human

> spontaneity on the part of the writers, and forbids the application to the Bible of any of the ordinary laws of criticism and exegesis. This one-sided view, though not quite obsolete even among Protestants, is tenable only on the medieval conception of the word of God as a supernatural communication of intellectual (noetic) truths too high for unaided reason, and was virtually condemned as soon as the Reformers began to seek in the Bible a personal revelation of the heart and will of God to man, calling forth in those to whom it came the answer of a personal faith. This new and living conception of the word of God led at once to the well-known Protestant principle that the Bible is to be interpreted by the same methods as other books, a principle which implies that the authors of Scripture wrote under the usual psychological conditions on which the laws of hermeneutics are calculated.

The fragment concludes as follows:

> While, therefore, the plan of the present work prescribes a critical sketch, not a theological discussion, as the proper business of this article, our account of the origin, collection and transmission of the Biblical writings will proceed throughout on a recognition of the unique religious value of the Bible as the record of a specific and supernatural Revelation, and we shall only briefly indicate the divergent views that arise when miracle is taken (as by the Tübingen school) to be a criterion of unhistorical narrative.[73]

Had these words been published they might have softened the impact of some of Smith's other ideas, but probably not much. "Bible" was a challenge that could scarcely go unanswered.[74]

Before the reader had finished the first column of the article

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[73]The manuscript of the deleted pages is photographically reproduced in Black and Chrystal, op. cit., following p. 178.

[74]One can readily appreciate the departure Smith's views represented from the conventional regard of the Old Testament by consulting the article "Bible" in the eighth edition of the Britannica (1854). It is a thoroughly conservative piece written by a Rev. James Taylor. Higher criticism is mentioned only to be summarily dismissed. The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is unhesitatingly endorsed. On the formation of the canon Taylor wrote ". . . we are warranted to conclude that the books of the Old Testament were successively sanctioned by Moses and the prophets, were acknowledged by the Jews before the exile as of divine authority, and that an authentic copy of each book, as soon as it was concluded, was laid up in the sanctuary, and placed under the care of the priests."

as printed he had been instructed that the Bible contained a number of independent records of the "gradual development," "struggle," and "progress" of a religion of revelation in contest with a "polytheistic nature worship." In the Old Testament the truer view proved its fitness by surviving in the long conflict which began at the Exodus and "did not issue in conclusive victory until the time of Ezra."[75] The creative leaders in this struggle were the prophets, who, in opposition to the priests ("In all ages a priesthood is conservative, not creative. . . ."), worked out in ever clearer form the contrast between true, moral religion and false, amoral religion. Such an appreciation of the work of the prophets, wrote Smith, was only possible when with modern scholarship they were seen in their true light, not as predictors of the future nor as preachers of old truths but as leaders in a great development from the "crude and imperfect" to the "relatively mature and adequate."

The growth of Old Testament religious ideas under prophetic aegis could be seen in the evolution of the Pentateuchal laws. Smith's understanding of this phenomenon, which many readers would find indistinguishable from that of Graf, Kuenen, or Wellhausen, can be gathered from the following summary statement:

> That the religious ideas of the Old Testament were in a state of growth during the whole prophetic period became manifest as soon as the laws of grammatico-historical exegesis were fairly applied to the Hebrew Scriptures. . . . For example, the law in Exod. XX. 24, ff., contemplates the worship of Jehovah on other altars than that of the central sanctuary (cf. Deut. XXXIII. 19). This practice, accordingly, was followed by Samuel, and was fully approved by Elijah (I Kings XIX. 14). But the worship of Jehovah on the

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[75] Smith made no reference to the patriarchal narratives though he had not long before championed their historicity.

> high places or local sanctuaries was constantly exposed to superstitious corruption and heathen admixture, and so is frequently attacked by the prophets of the 8th century. It was undoubtedly under their influence that Hezekiah abolished the high places. The abolition was not permanent; but in the reign of Josiah, the next reforming king, we find that the principle of a single sanctuary can claim the support not only of prophetic teaching, but of a written law-book found in the temple, and acknowledged by the high priest (2 Kings XXII., XXIII.). The legislation of this book corresponds not with the old law in Exodus, but with the book of Deuteronomy. But perhaps the clearest proof that, during the period of prophetic inspiration, there was no doctrine of finality with regard to the ritual law any more than with regard to religious ideas and doctrines, lies in the last chapters of Ezekiel, which sketch at the very era of the Captivity an outline of sacred ordinances for the future restoration. From these and similar facts it follows indisputably, that the true and spiritual religion which the prophets and like-minded priests maintained at once against heathenism and against unspiritual worship of Jehovah as a mere national deity without moral attributes, was not a finished but a growing system, not finally embodied in authoritative documents, but propagated mainly by direct personal efforts.[76]

That such a reconstruction demanded "a changed view of the authorship of the Pentateuch," Smith readily admitted.

Smith then stated the case for the composite authorship of the historical books. In the Hexateuch, for instance, he saw evidence of a "Jehovistic narrative," of an "Elohim-document," and of a third author "whose literary individuality is in truth sharply marked, though the limits of his contribution to the Pentateuch are obscure."[77] The Book of Deuteronomy Smith called a "prophetic legislative program" unknown before the time of King Josiah. It cannot, said Smith, "be placed at the beginning of the theocratic development without making the whole history unintelligible." If the author of Deuteronomy put his words in Moses' mouth he did so not in pious fraud "but simply to expound and

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[76] Encyclopedia Britannica, 9th ed., vol. IX, 634-35.

[77] The paradox in that sentence did not escape the notice of unfriendly reviewers.

develop Mosaic principles in relation to new needs." Smith then presented certain lines of evidence indicating a post-exilic date for the "Levitico-Elohistic document" (that is P), but he did so without giving his personal, explicit sanction to the idea. We must agree with Black and Chrystal that the version of Mosaic religion given in the article "Bible" was a new one for Smith "and might well have been regarded as revolutionary."[78]

In the preface to the Encyclopedia Biblica, a four volume work dedicated to Smith, T. K. Cheyne and J. S. Black state that when Smith wrote "Bible," "he was still not absolutely sure about the chronological place of P (Priestly Code)." When precisely Smith made up his mind on this question is as yet an obscure point. There is in the Smith MSS a lecture entitled "Leviticus XVI and Ezekiel." Unfortunately it bears no date. Neither Black and Chrystal nor any other authority, to my knowledge, make mention of it yet its importance in Smith's intellectual biography would be considerable, if, as seems possible, it was written not too long after "Bible." From the opening paragraph it appears Smith had been asked by a "Society" to address himself to the

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[78]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 183. J. H. Brown, op. cit., p. 137, on the contrary, writes "it must be stated that his views in the article were not generally in advance of the positions he had previously articulated on numerous occasions during his tenure in Aberdeen." A group of Smith's former students apparently would not agree with Brown. They rose to Smith's defense during the trial with a Statement by Ministers in the Free Church who Studied under Rev. Professor W. R. Smith, anent the Character and Substance of Professor Smith's Teaching in the Free Church Hall, Aberdeen. While lauding Smith for his talent as a teacher, theologian, and counselor, they minimized the place of higher criticism in his teaching. "As to the Deuteronomic question," they wrote, "we are not aware of its ever having been discussed in the class-room. His course of teaching did not bring the question before us. . . . Instead of being the medium for discussing debatable matters the lectures were singularly barren of critical theories. . . ."

question of the date of the so called Priestly or P material in the Pentateuch. The late date, which the newest school of critics was assigning to the Priest's Code depended in part on Ezekiel's supposed ignorance of its stipulations and conversely on the dependence of the Priest's Code on the liturgical innovations presumably reflected in Ezekiel 40-48. In his lecture Smith unambiguously yielded the ground he had earlier held and joined the partisans of the revolution he had heretofore opposed. "Personally," he wrote, "I believe the religious theory on which the P[riest's] L[aw] is based is absolutely inconsistent with the whole constitution of old Israel; that neither the Kingdom of David nor the prophecies of Isaiah would have been possible in a nation which accepted the Pentateuch as we now have it as an authoritative Divine code."

He then proceeded to show how the linchpin could be removed from the structure of Old Testament history as it had always appeared to earlier generations of both humble and learned readers. When the sources of the Pentateuch were allowed to come together again the "Mosaic" theocracy and cult had slipped to a post-prophetic, post-exilic position where it appeared as the late fruit of a long evolutionary process. Smith's technique was to make a comparison of the rites of atonement in Leviticus 16 and the last chapters of Ezekiel. He concluded that the Pentateuchal ordinances were clearly the latter of the two. The ceremony in Leviticus was in fact a development of that proposed by Ezekiel. Using an argument popularized by Graf and Kuenen, Smith continued, "The primary evidence for the dependence of the Levitical legislation on Ezekiel must always be in the fact that

Ezekiel pronounces a sentence of degradation on the Levites and that in the Levitical legislation this degradation appears as carried out. Here the argument is complete, because Ezekiel himself tells us that the absolute distinction he establishes between priests and Levites is new. And we have in the history sufficient material to supply full historical confirmation of the proposition."

CHAPTER IV

THE FREE CHURCH AND HIGHER CRITICISM

The conflict between higher criticism and orthodox theology that vexed several Christian communions at the end of the nineteenth century received its earliest full scale discussion in the Free Church of Scotland.[1] Though the Scottish Free Church was among the youngest and smallest of the churches of Christendom, in the Robertson Smith case it was called on to wrestle with a problem of truly catholic

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[1]For a discussion of higher criticism in the Roman Catholic Church see Alec Vidler, op. cit., pp. 179-89. The problem in the American Presbyterian Church is treated by Lefferts A. Loetscher, The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), pp. 18-74. Loetscher stated that, "the Robertson Smith case was the immediate occasion of bringing Biblical criticism before the American Presbyterian Church. . . ." P. 28. There are a number of points of interest raised by this ramification of the Smith case. Charles Augustus Briggs and Henry Preserved Smith, the two scholars tried for heresy for their higher critical views by the American Presbyterian Church, were both in correspondence with Smith. They both saw his struggle as foreshadowing their own troubles. But ultimately the matter was handled quite differently in the two communions. The Free Church was unable to show that belief in the inerrancy of the Bible was required by the Westminster Confession. The American Presbyterian Church, strongly influenced by the high tradition of conservative scholarship emanating from Princeton Seminary (see footnote 7, Chapter II, supra), asserted unequivocally that Scripture in the autographic text was free from all error. The Westminster Confession was understood to support, even to demand, this doctrine of Scripture. Both Charles Briggs and Henry Smith were put out of the Church because their critical positions contradicted this doctrine. Dissatisfaction with the Westminster Confession as interpreted in the Princeton tradition led to the adoption in 1967 of a new confession by the United Presbyterian Church in the United States. The whole question of the way the Westminster Divines

importance.[2] As a crisis in the institutional life of that Church Smith's trial has received the attention of several scholars.[3] So though we begin this chapter with a synopsis of the case, calling attention to some aspects of Smith's conduct not noted by earlier writers, we need not here give another detailed account of the case as it developed between 1876 and 1881. It is our greater concern in this chapter to study Smith's effort to reconcile the method and conclusions of higher criticism with the theology of his Church as formulated in the Westminster Confession. This was the matter that lifted the Smith case

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and the Princeton Schoolmen may have differed in their understanding of the nature of Scripture is discussed in great detail by Jack Bartlett Rogers, Scripture in the Westminster Confession: A Problem of Historical Interpretation for American Presbyterianism (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Company, 1967). Rogers sees the Princeton theology as an aberration. His understanding of the teaching of the Westminster Divines goes far toward vindicating Robertson Smith's interpretation of the Confession. It is interesting that Rogers finds a great deal of continuity between the theology of the Westminster Divines and the Barthian or Neo-Orthodox theology that influenced the drafters of the Confession of 1967 and that therefore much of the reaction against the Westminster Confession that led to the Confession of 1967 was unwarranted. The important question of Smith's differences with the Princeton theology was discussed by Smith's good friend Thomas Lindsay in "Professor W. Robertson Smith's Doctrine of Scripture," The Expositor, Fourth Series X (1894), 241-64, and "The Doctrine of Scripture: The Reformers and the Princeton School," The Expositor, Fifth Series I (1895), 278-93.

[2]"This case belongs to Christendom at large; for it raises an important inquiry concerning the relation of the church to Christian scholarship. Can she pour the new wine of biblical learning into the old bottles of the Reformation creeds, or must she face the possibility of being obliged to reconstruct or construct anew the symbols of her faith?" Francis L. Patton, "Rationalism in the Free Church of Scotland," The Princeton Review, New Series Five, I (1880), 105-24. "In a real sense the Robertson Smith case completed--or made an approach to completing the liberating work begun at the Reformation . . . as it came to be realized that the example of a relatively small Church, grappling with a problem of universal urgency, might have far-reaching results for the extension of liberty or the entrenchment of Old Tradition." G. F. Barbour, op. cit., p. 202.

[3]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 179-451; Simpson, op. cit.,

out of its parochial setting and gave it an enduring relevance. If historical criticism of the Bible could take a rightful place in a communion whose Reformation Orthodoxy was defined by the Westminster Divines then the Christian Church at large need have no fear.

A Summary History of the Case

It will be helpful for understanding the furor over Smith's article, "Bible," to bear in mind certain peculiarities of the Free Church of Scotland. For one thing, the presbyterian government of the Church meant that the battle over higher criticism could not be limited to a dispute among theologians. The ultimate decision in the matter rested largely with the laity and ordinary pastors.[4] For over four years the daily press in Scotland was filled with long reports of presbyterial and General Assembly debates. An abundance of books and pamphlets on higher criticism appeared. One wonders if at any time and place but nineteenth-century Scotland such widespread interest could have been generated on matters such as the date of the Deuteronomic Code or of the true nature of prophecy. Such was the public interest that the uproar in the Anglican Church over the Colenso case and the

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I, 306-428; Carswell, op. cit., pp. 54-120; Henry F. Henderson, The Religious Controversies of Scotland (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), pp. 207-30.

[4]The caustic observation of one anti-Smith writer was that, "it is well known that the vote of the last general assembly became what it was by a majority of elders on the professor's side. . . . Well, the elders of the Church are excellent men, . . . but I don't know a single elder who can lift a Bible and read a verse in Hebrew, far less distinguish the Aramaic roots, and decide between the earlier and later Hebrew tongue." Some of these elders "display a bearing worthy of Rome herself, in protesting against even the discussion of the matter. The words that seem to express the attitude of many are these: 'We go in for Smith, but we don't go into particulars.'" William Forwell, Remarks on Professor Smith's Theory of Scripture (3rd ed., Dundee: James P. Mathew & Co., 1881), pp. 24-25.

publication of Essays and Reviews bears no comparison. The Smith controversy differed, too, from these earlier battles over higher criticism in that Smith was a professor in a Church presumed untainted by "continental rationalism." The positions Smith took in his encyclopedia article had been previously associated with rank unbelief or at least heterodoxy. As one Free Churchman said it was "a startling experience" for "a unanimously orthodox and pronouncedly evangelical Church to find the critical views commonly associated with rationalistic churches in her bosom. . . ."[5]

From her inception in the "Disruption of 1843" the Free Kirk had defined herself in opposition to the marked tendency toward "Moderation" in the Established Church. If anything, the evangelical temper of the Free Church was stronger in 1876 than it had ever been. The American revivalists, Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey, in their 1873-74 tour of Scotland had been warmly received by Free Churchmen.[6] As one minister described it, there was in those days "an outpouring of the Holy Spirit more extensive and remarkable than has taken place since Apostolic times."[7] There was little likelihood that persons whose spiritual life was stimulated or nourished by the preaching of D. L. Moody would find much to applaud in Professor Smith's view of Scripture. "One cannot fail to see," wrote one Free Churchman, "a

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[5]Simpson, op. cit., I, 307.

[6]There is a good account of the Moody revivals in Scotland in George Adam Smith, The Life of Henry Drummond (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1898), pp. 58-108.

[7]Quoted in Fleming, op. cit., pp. 236-37.

Providence in the fact that [Moody's work] strengthened the evangelical foundations just before they had to stand the critical attacks on what seemed to many the necessary outworks."[8]

It would be an error, however, to think there were no persons in Smith's Church in 1876 in sympathy with him on critical matters nor any at least tolerant of a range of speculation big enough to include him. Among those who from the first gave their public support to Smith were such influential ministers as Marcus Dod and Alexander Whyte and such fellow professors as James Candlish and Thomas Lindsay. It was the support of these men that in a sense forced Smith to keep up his fight year after year. As he wrote to John McLennan in 1879:

> I mean to fight them for another year. It is hard to make-up one's mind to do it; but were I to give in the adversary would score and many friends--notably James Candlish who freely publishes the fact that he has now satisfied himself that all the laws in Deuteronomy are not Mosaic--would be left in an evil case.[9]

The adversary referred to in this letter was the group of leaders in the Free Church, many of them old and revered, who were not prepared to accommodate their theology to the findings of higher criticism. This group included such men as Dr. James Begg, viewed by almost all writers on the subject as an inveterate "sower of discord"; Dr. Duff, Smith's old professor of Evangelistic Theology; Drs. Andrew and Horatio Bonar, the former sometime Moderator of the Assembly, the latter a noted saint and hymn writer; and Sir Henry Moncreiff, scion of one of Scotland's most respected noble families. Probably the most maligned and misunderstood figure in the Smith controversy was Dr. Robert Rainy, Principal

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Smith to J. F. McLennan, 24 June 1879, Smith MSS, 7449-1.

of New College, Edinburgh, and the acknowledged leader of the Church's Assembly. Though personally sympathetic to the reverent use of critical methods in studying Scripture[10] and though kindly disposed toward Smith at the start of the trouble, in the end he found it necessary to lead a movement calling for an ouster of Smith from his Chair even though the charges of heresy had not been sustained. The alternatives to this highhanded act were either to see a revision of the Creed closing the door on all future critical studies or to see the Church break apart in factional strife. Rainy was often accused of sacrificing an innocent man for the peace of the Church. To say this, however, is to greatly oversimplify the problem. Smith's conduct, as will be evident from the following narrative, was not wholly above reproach. In his zeal for truth as he understood it he lacked any sensitivity to the tender consciences of his less sophisticated brethren. Rainy was far more the Pauline Christian in this regard. To call Rainy "a Jesuit" as Smith was wont to do was surely an injustice. At the very worst Rainy was simply a casuist whose grasp of the Church and its work in the world was more complete than Smith's.[11]

The volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica containing "Bible" appeared in December, 1875. The first reviewer to raise questions about the soundness of the article was not one of Smith's fellow Churchmen but a leader in the Established Church, a Dr. A. H. Charteris, Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of Edinburgh. Charteris began by mocking the Free Church that "with great wisdom, has

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[10]Robert Rainy, The Bible and Criticism (London, 1878).

[11]Simpson, op. cit., I, 318.

been picking out its youngest ministers inorder that they may devote their whole, undistracted life to scientific study in their professional chairs." The readers of "Bible" might well expect something orthodox and vigorous, therefore, from Smith's pen, but they shall be disappointed. According to Charteris, Smith had only reproduced the well-known theories of Kuenen--"the most 'advanced' theologian in Holland."

> Like his master, Kuenen, Smith founds greatly on the prophets as reformers and describes them not as inspired teachers of old truths or as predictors of inspired events but as "leaders of a great development, in which the religious ordinances as well as the religious beliefs of the Old Covenant advanced from a relatively crude and imperfect to a relatively mature and adequate form." This is a somewhat vague way of saying what Kuenen teaches with iteration--that to the prophets of Israel we owe it, not only that there was faith in a living Spirit, but also such ordinances as embody a suitable worship of the Spirit; in short we owe both the "Mosaic" law and the spiritual monotheism to the prophets who prophesied not long before the captivity.[12]

Though he was a scholar in a Church professedly more liberal than Smith's, Charteris evidently had no sympathy for such a rereading of the sacred record. The article would have been somewhat different, he said, had not Smith failed to draw on the findings of recent archaeological and Egyptological work. And why was Smith's research thus handicapped? "Had Kuenen been interested in the ruins of Egypt and the traces of Amalek so probably would W. R. Smith have been." The question

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[12] "The New Encyclopedia Britannica on Theology," Edinburgh Courant, 15 April 1876, p. 4. Another scholar of the Established Church who got into the fray was John Tulloch with his article, "The Progress of Religious Thought in Scotland," The Contemporary Review, XXXIX (1876-77), 535-48. Tulloch applauded Smith for his enlightened views but suggested that he had not perceived the larger consequences in terms of a reconstruction of theology to which his critical findings pointed. This was the kind of support Smith thought he could well afford to do without.

of Smith's dependence on Kuenen was a debatable matter and the sarcasm was perhaps unwarranted, but questions were here raised that a communion proud of its freedom from taint of "rationalism" could not overlook.

Soon within the ranks of the Free Church itself it was being suggested that a full investigation was in order. The responsibility in the first instance for such a matter rested with the denomination's College Committee. The Committee, consisting of eleven ministers and nine elders, discussed the problem and concluded that a prosecution for heresy should be avoided since it would only likely serve to accentuate divisions already latent in the Church and would hardly make a suitable climate for the dispassionate discussion of the questions raised by Smith's work. The plan was to seek from Smith some clarifying, and hopefully conciliatory, statement regarding his view of Scripture as revelation. Smith was advised of the Committee's concern and wish.[13] Several leading men, some of them close friends of Smith, sought in vain to get him to offer some public clarification of his views on controverted points. Dr. Rainy even went so far as to draft an example of the kind of statement he thought Smith might well give.[14] It must be said that Smith received these overtures with something less than a pliant regard for the judgment and feelings of his brethren. He took the position that if he was wrong then he must be formally charged. Until such charges were made it was not his place to offer clarifying statements.[15]

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[13]Letter from James Candlish to W. R. Smith, 17 May 1876, Smith MSS.

[14]For the text and context of this curious document see Simpson, op. cit., I, 323-26.

[15]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 192.

Smith, however, did not abide by this resolve. In June, 1876, an anonymous pamphlet appeared in Edinburgh titled Infidelity in the Aberdeen Free Church College.[16] It was a haranguing, inflammatory, uninformed piece of work, filled with sensational charges calculated to arouse the crassest fears of Free Churchmen. Smith could not restrain himself. Mistaking the source of the pamphlet, he fired off a volley in kind. He published a long letter in the Daily Review for June 21 returning his critic's invective while responding to each of the ten charges the writer had made against him. In addition, Smith informed the College Committee that they could look upon this letter as the public profession of orthodoxy they had been seeking. By this course of action, Smith only widened the gap between himself and moderate leaders in the Church who were as yet open-minded on the question of the soundness of his critical views.

In the face of mounting public pressure the College Committee was obliged to issue some statement. The Committee's Draft Report was made public on 17 January 1877. The gist of the report was that while the Committee found no sufficient grounds for a process of heresy, it did think "the article, in opposition to Professor Smith's avowed intention, is of a dangerous and unsettling tendency." The Committee's report was not unanimous. Two minority reports were also filed, one more stringent in its judgment of Smith, the other less so.[17] This report was placed before the Assembly of the Church when it met in

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[16][Robert Young], Infidelity in Aberdeen Free Church College (Edinburgh, 1876).

[17]Free Church of Scotland, Special Report of the College Committee on Professor Smith's Article "Bible" (Edinburgh: MacLaren & MacNiven, 1877).

May, 1877. It was here, too, that Smith anticipated his accusers by demanding that they formally indict him for his supposed heresies; in the vernacular of Scottish jurisprudence, he demanded a libel.[18] The unanimous judgment of the Assembly was to accommodate the professor in this matter and until the issue had been resolved to suspend him from his teaching duties. The case was then referred for processing to the Presbytery of Aberdeen, the jurisdiction to which Smith was most immediately responsible.

The persons who drew up the libel had considerable difficulty agreeing on just what the precise charges should be. It took them eight months to prepare the document. However, Smith was sufficiently forewarned of its contents by friends that a few days after the Libel was transmitted to him in February, 1878, he could publish his Answer to the Form of Libel. This sixty-four page statement must be classed among the most brilliant products of his pen. Its contents will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The Draft Form of Libel was a long and complex document.[19] In

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[18]The Clerk of the Assembly explained this circumstance as follows: "The anxious desire of the writer was that through a Committee of the Assembly or otherwise there should be an earnest and brotherly conference with the Professor before steps were taken toward a Libel, and that, if possible, repeated efforts should be put forth to bring about harmony of view between the Church and one so highly esteemed as an appointed teacher for her students. . . ."

But the Professor's will was otherwise. He was set upon a Libel. He desired the issue to turn exclusively on the inquiry whether his already published opinions were contrary to the Confession of Faith." Sir Henry W. Moncrieff, History of the Case of Professor W. Robertson Smith in the Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: John MacLaren and Sons, 1879), pp. 38-39.

[19]For the full text of the document see Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 582-99.

accordance with a standard form for such cases it was designed on the lines of a syllogism. The major proposition charged that to promulgate a certain view was contrary to the doctrine of the Church as stated in the Westminster Confession. The minor proposition averred that a certain person had in fact promulgated the said view. The conclusion demanded the punishment of the accused. In Smith's case the major proposition was especially complicated. There were really three charges that the court was asked to find relevant. The doctrine in question was that of "the immediate inspiration, infallible truth, and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. . . ." It was said to be an offense in a Professor of Divinity to publish opinions that either (1) "contradict" this doctrine, or (2) had a "dangerous and unsettling tendency" as respects this doctrine, or (3) that by their "neutrality" tend to disparage this doctrine. Eight particular positions were then stated which were supposed to be inconsistent in at least one of the above senses with the Church doctrine of Scripture. Reduced considerably from the language of their official form the eight particulars were as follows:

> Primo.--The laws and ordinances of the Levitical system were in great part not instituted in the time of Moses.
>
> Secundo.--Deuteronomy does not possess the character of a historical record which it claims, but was made to assume it by a writer of a much later age.
>
> Tertio.--The sacred writers took freedoms and committed errors like other authors. They gave explanations that were unnecessary and incorrect; they put fictitious speeches into the mouths of their historical characters; they gave inferences of their own for facts; they described arrangements as existing at a certain time which did not come into existence till long afterwards; they wrote under the influence of party spirit and for party purposes.
>
> Quarto. --Certain books of Scripture are of the nature of fiction, and in literary merit they are not all on the same level.
>
> Quinto.--The book of Canticles is devoid of any spiritual significance, and only presents a high example of virtue in a betrothed maiden.

> Sexto.--The New Testament citations of Old Testament books by the titles then current cannot be regarded as conclusive testimony as to their actual authorship.
>
> Septimo.--The predictions of the Prophets were due merely to so-called spiritual insight, and were not predictions in the sense of being direct supernatural revelations of events long posterior to the date at which they were uttered.
>
> Octavo.--The reality of Angels is in the Bible a matter of assumption rather than of direct teaching, as also is their endowment with special goodness and insight analogous to human qualities.[20]

The minor proposition set forth excerpts from Smith's published statements which it averred showed him to hold the positions which the major proposition condemned. There were two stages in the prosecution of such a case. First, determination of the "relevancy" of the charges set forth in the major. Second, the "probation"--the proof that the accused held the views in question. It was plain to see that the men who drafted the libel had tried to make an exceedingly fine net in which to catch their prey but he turned out to be even stronger and slipperier than his most zealous pursuers had anticipated. The weakness of the libel was that its charge that Smith contradicted the Confession was based not on any explicit statement of his but on an inference as to the logical effect of his statements. The strength of this inference varied according to the way the Confession's doctrine of inspiration was understood.

The case was first argued in the Presbytery Hall of Aberdeen in February and March of 1878.[21] In Aberdeen Smith was on his home soil.

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[20] Ibid., pp. 242-43.

[21] The Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen, Report of Proceedings in the Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen, February 14 to March 14, 1878: The Libel against Professor William Robertson Smith (Aberdeen, 1878).

He had many close friends on the Presbytery and was a popular figure in the city. His speeches were applauded and cheered by the crowds who filled the Hall day after day. Before the wondering eyes of his students and friends Smith, acting as his own advocate, tore apart bit by bit the fabric of his accusers' case. Concerning Smith's performance P. Carnegie Simpson wrote:

> It may be questioned if any man in modern times has displayed a greater variety of brilliant gifts than did William Robertson Smith during the trial before the Presbytery and in the subsequent appeal to the higher courts. In Old Testament criticism he was facile princeps, but his talents seemed unlimited. In pure theology, he taught his hearers the doctrine of inspiration from the great divines as few had taught it before. In law, he showed a knowledge and acumen that overwhelmed professional authorities. In sheer dialectic he was irresistible, and many a time left his opponents lying pierced under the fifth rib. And with it all emerged the man's simple religious, Protestant, evangelical faith. The Church was trying him, but he was educating the Church.[22]

Of course not everyone had such a high opinion of Smith's performance. One who came to listen but found no pleasure in Smith's style or light in his argument was a Rev. Kennedy of Dingwall. He said of Smith:

> His voice is thin and sharp. I am right sure he can't sing, for there is no melody in his tones, and no music in his heart at all. But he has good lungs in his chest, and hard brass on his brow, and he will stand and he will speak, till you might think that the feet and tongue of the creature would be clean wearied. There is a great deal in him, but it was put into him, and oh, hasn't he the power to put it forth! His mind is like a shop with a big cellar behind it, and having good shelves and windows. His memory is the cellar, and it has a great deal of stuff in it, and his mind has shelves for his gear and his tongue is smart in setting them out. But he doesn't grow his own wool, nor does he spin the thread nor weave the webs that are in his cellar or on his shelves. All his goods come in paper parcels from Germany, for in that country they can spin and weave without one tuft of wool; they take their thread, like a spider, out of their own bowels. His friends are fond of saying that he has mastered the German learning. But

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[22] Simpson, op. cit., I, 334.

> I am thinking rather that the German learning has mastered him. . . . But oh! that tongue of his can rattle quick. And he can stick to his point as well as a limpet to a stone, or rather as the wheels to the rails, for he will be going till you would think that he would never halt. And his body doesn't make much fuss about it. A tiny little hand at his side is working like the docked tail of a pony when the midges are bad, but that is all the help the other parts of his body give to his tongue. It gets almost all the work to do, and all it needs to keep it going is a little calfsfoot oil from the heels that are thumping in the gallery. And he is as empty of reverence and as smart as a weasel; and he has as little common sense as a sucking calf. His gifts are cleverness and memory. And it's for this same that they made an idol of him. Well! well! if that's all they have to make them proud of him, they will get a thousand times more of that in the Evil One himself. Oh, but it's a sad pass we have come to, when a little of what the Devil has much of will make a man great in the Church. And there is another point in which the two agree; and that is, ill-will to the Bible, with a sham of respect for it, for Satan would have us to think that he does not despise it, for he makes use of it as a tempter, just as he did in the great battle in the wilderness.[23]

The majority of the Aberdeen Presbytery did not see Smith in quite such an infernal light. Suffice it to say that the Presbytery found Smith guilty of no heretical contradiction of the Confession but did support the relevance of the lesser charge of "publishing and promulgating opinions of a dangerous and unsettling tendency."[24] The grounds on which Smith successfully defended himself against the charge of contradicting the Confession is a point we will examine later. Both the minority of the Presbytery who had fought for the "contradicting" charge and Smith and his friends who denied the validity of the "tendency" charge appealed to the General Assembly. Consequently the terms of the Libel had to be debated all over again when the Assembly held its 1878 session in Glasgow.[25]

The appeals had to do with the question of the relevance of the

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[23] As quoted in Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 401.

[24] Ibid., p. 258. [25] Ibid., p. 272.

charges, the probation of them still being a responsibility of the Presbytery. The Assembly supported the Presbytery in finding the tendency charge relevant, however, the wording of the charge was amended so as to give a somewhat more precise meaning to the charge. It defined the offence as:

> The publishing and promulgating of writings concerning the Scripture which, by their ill-considered and unguarded setting forth of speculations of a critical kind, tend to awaken doubt, especially in the case of students, of the divine truth, inspiration, and authority of any of the books of Scripture. . . .[26]

But the Assembly also reversed the decision of the Presbytery as pertains secundo. To affirm that Moses did not write Deuteronomy would be a teaching in contradiction to the Confessional statement on the inspiration and authority of Scripture.[27]

The libel in its amended form was returned to the Presbytery of Aberdeen for probation. Again the issues were debated on each of the particular charges. By a narrow margin Smith succeeded in having all the charges against him dismissed.[28] Once more, however, a dissident minority of the Presbytery appealed the decision to the General Assembly. The Assembly of 1875 saw fit to sustain the decision of the Presbytery in dismissing the "tendency" charge, in effect reversing its own previous judgment.[29] On the matter of secundo under the first charge of the major, the vexed question of the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy, the Assembly, with perhaps dubious legality, proceeded to draft a new libel dealing with this one issue. In the so-called "Short Libel" Smith was charged with "contradicting the doctrine of the

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[26] For text of the Amended Libel see Ibid., pp. 600-604.

[27] Ibid., pp. 274-79. [28] Ibid., p. 297. [29] Ibid., p. 320.

immediate inspiration, infallible truth, and divine authority of Holy Scripture" by promulgating the opinion that the Book of Deuteronomy "which is professedly an historical record, does not possess that character, but was made to assume it by a writer of a much later age, who therein, in the name of God, presented, in dramatic form, instructions and laws as proceeding from the mouth of Moses, though these never were, and never could have been uttered by him."[30]

At this point the case became bogged down in legal questions every bit as tangled as the theological issues. By-passing these complications we can note that the case was still alive when the General Assembly met in 1880. It had now dragged on for three years. The factions it had generated were threatening the unity of the Church at large. The leaders of the Assembly looked for some sort of compromise that would get them out of the legal tangles that had arisen and restore calm to the Church. The proposal which won the support of a majority of the Assembly was to drop the charges against Professor Smith but to have the Moderator of the Assembly publicly admonish Smith that in the future he must not publish such unguarded and incomplete statements as had given rise to the present difficulties.[31] After being duly admonished Robertson Smith took the stand and uttered these humble words:

> Moderator, I hope that I am not out of place when I say that while I thank God for the issue of this evening--an issue which I trust will be for His glory and for the maintenance of His truth--I have never been more sensible than on the present occasion of the blame that rests upon me for statements which have proved so incomplete that, even at the end of three years, the opinion of this House has been so divided upon them. I feel that, in the providence of God, this is a very weighty lesson to one placed, as I am, in the position of a teacher, and I hope that by His grace I shall not fail to learn by it.[32]

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[30] Ibid., pp. 605-07. [31] Ibid., p. 354. [32] Ibid., p. 360.

For the moment it looked as though the weary Church would have a respite from strife and that the young professor, having perhaps matured in the course of his trials, would hereafter use caution and restraint in venturing to publish opinions on points of critical scholarship.

But the period of calm was short indeed. Just a few days after the close of the Assembly of 1880 the eleventh volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica was published with its long article by Smith on "Hebrew Language and Literature." It was at this time, too, that Smith's paper on "Animal Worship and Animal Tribes Among the Arabs and in Old Testament" was published in the Journal of Philology.[33] This paper, inspired by his friend McLennan's totem theory, made a very unfavorable impression in some quarters of the Church.[34] And as for the encyclopedia article, it was clear to any who cared to read it that Smith had written another account of Old Testament history from the same standpoint he took in "Bible" though with even less recognition of the supernatural side of that history. Petitions of protest, emanating from the same old sources, were soon being sent to the College Committee. There were many, even among Smith's friends, who were at a loss to explain these new articles in view of the spirit in which agreement had been reached at the recent Assembly. Of course the articles had long been in preparation but then why, it was asked, had Smith not at least notified the Assembly that they would be forthcoming and that he hoped

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[33] Discussed in Chapter V, infra.

[34] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 381-82.

in view of the new found spirit of cooperation they would occasion no alarm.

When the Assembly of 1881 met it voted to deny Smith henceforth the right to teach in any Free Church College.[35] The motion was passed by a majority of 163. By this action it should be noted the Free Church was not passing judgment so much on the legitimacy of particular critical conclusions as she was removing a teacher in whose judgment and in whose fitness to teach divinity students there was no longer confidence. The action of the Assembly was explained by its leaders, such as Principal Rainy, as stemming from a "reserve of power" which could be used in circumstances where ordinary constitutional procedures were unavailing. That Smith should be dismissed from his Chair is not especially remarkable. What is surprising is that the Free Church theologians and Bible scholars arrayed against Smith were unable to show that though he frankly affirmed his belief in the conclusions of the most advanced Old Testament critics he had thereby denied "the immediate inspiration, infallible truth, and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures."

If Smith might draw some satisfaction from his success in thus vindicating his theological position he was understandably bitter at the ultimate action of the Assembly. He had fought his battle every inch of the way on the grounds of ecclesiastical law and now the Church had used against him a weapon that had no legal precedent or constitutional basis.[36] He withdrew himself from all ministerial functions in

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[35] Ibid., p. 445.

[36] This is the burden of Smith's Open Letter to Principal Rainy (Edinburgh: Printed for private circulation).

the Church, though technically the action of the Assembly had not affected his status as a minister. When a continuation of his professor's salary was proffered he declared in no uncertain terms that he would not eat the bread of a Church that would not accept his services.[37]

Smith was deeply affected by the Church's treatment of him. One friend remembered him saying with tear-filled eyes one night after the struggle was over, "Don't they see that I can't give up the truth."[38] Smith was especially bitter toward Principal Rainy and he did not hesitate to vent his feelings in this matter. Statements from his own pen could be cited but perhaps this letter to Smith from a friend gives an adequate glimpse of Smith's attitude.

> I am writing now to beg you to come <u>to us</u> this winter. We shall have a little "prophet's chamber" here. . . . But don't bring a hard and bitter spirit--you had it sometimes last winter--and I know well that you could not help feeling chafed and sorely tried at times but you will excuse me if I tell you how often I was pained at your wholesale denunciations of everybody and everything."[39]

Undoubtedly a source of disappointment to Smith was the failure of his old mentor, A. B. Davidson, to rise to his pupil's defense. Smith wanted Davidson's support and even had some right to expect it given Davidson's orientation toward higher criticism. As early as January, 1877, Smith wrote to his friend Alexander Whyte saying: "I wish Davidson would come forward now--not for my sake but for his own. He has passive courage--i.e., if I were turned out he would resign.

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[37]White and Geddes, <u>op. cit</u>.

[38]Reminiscence by W. Y. McDonald, Smith MSS, 7476-6.

[39]Letter from Ada Grant to W. R. Smith dated 13 November 1880, Smith MSS, 4779-4.

But courage to commit suicide as Black calls it, is not what will help the Church."[40] Davidson maintained his silence throughout the struggle and did not, contrary to Smith's expectation, resign when Smith went down. Davidson's biographer gave this interesting explanation of his conduct:

> He was silent and gave a silent vote in the great debates, because he believed that he was best serving God and his Church by being silent. He had, from the beginning of his career as a teacher, determined to pursue a certain course in educating his Church in the principles of historical criticism. Year after year he had seen his educational ideas verified and his methods justified by results. And when he found his brilliant pupil adopting a radically different method, which seemed to him clearly mistaken, he could not give him the active support he would otherwise have rejoiced to give him. . . . When he saw his best pupil, himself now a teacher, seeking to force critical methods upon an unenlightened and unconvinced Church, attempting to convert with law, logic, libels, brilliant dialectic and splendid scorn, his instinct told him that all this was gravely wrong. He liked least of all the scorn--though many thought it splendid--which called the other party one of ignorance or stupidity (Dummheit was a word in frequent use), which spoke of them collectively as "the adversary," "the enemy" while it applied to individual opponents such terms as "raw preacher," "worldly ecclesiastic," "Jesuit," "poltroon."[41]

Albrecht Ritschl, another teacher whose influence on Smith we have noted above, was keenly interested in the case and gave his student strong encouragement to carry on the fight. As Black and Chrystal put it, in the Robertson Smith case "Ritschl saw Ritschlianism on trial. . . ."[42] Particularly interesting are these lines Ritschl wrote to Smith after the publication of the Answer to the Form of Libel.

> Your answer is first rate, and I have greatly enjoyed the manner in which you light up the question of the danger to faith that may be

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[40]Letter from W. R. Smith to Alexander Whyte dated 24 January 1877. Smith MSS.

[41]Strahan, op. cit., p. 239.

[42]Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 247.

> involved in doctrines not themselves erroneous. I am glad too to learn that the Westminster divines give to the doctrine of inspiration a meaning so broad that we can be content with it. If it were compulsory to interpret the clauses in accordance with the theological usage of framers, the case would perhaps be otherwise. . . .
>
> If you were right last year in calling me the "only begetter" of the Aberdeen heresy, I wonder if it will be any consolation to you to know that a follower of my theology who belongs to the Moravian brotherhood has just been dismissed from his school. Against him too the charge was made that the Bible cannot be God's word, if it merely contains the early records of Christianity. . . .[43]

Since this letter indicates that Smith thought of Ritschl as the true source of the "Aberdeen heresy," it is remarkable how carefully in his defense Smith avoided all reference to Ritschl or for that matter to any other of the Neo-Protestant theologians who had influenced him. Smith claimed to find all the theological support he needed in the works of Calvin, Luther, and the Westminster Confession itself.

Smith's Defense of Higher Criticism

In the spring of 1876 when the clouds of opposition were just beginning to gather on the horizon, Smith delivered a lecture at the Free Church College on "The Progress of Old Testament Studies."[44] It was yet another of those statements through which he attempted to educate his colleagues and students to an appreciation of the critical method. This statement laid bare some hermeneutical and theological principles which Smith would rarely again make so clear. His main idea was to show the legitimacy of higher criticism by arguing that it rested on the same methodological assumptions as lower criticism so that a

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[43] Ibid.

[44] The lecture was subsequently published in the British and Foreign Evangelical Review, XXV (1876), 471-93.

scholarship which availed itself of the latter could hardly be consistent if it avoided the practice of the former.

As so often was the case in his literary work, Smith seized on a palpable opponent whose position he could derogate in the process of showing the superiority of his own. In this case the erring scholar was Dr. Edward Pusey of Oxford, who had but recently expressed his continuing preference for the Authorized Version of the Old Testament, and his satisfaction with the linguistic science which had guided its translators. Pusey found the emendations of the text made by modern scholars through the use of cognate dialects an arbitrary and reckless business resulting in the substitution of "chaff for wheat" and "introducing an indefinite amount of error into the Word of God." But, alas, said Smith to his brethren, "it is to be feared that analogous views are by no means unknown among ourselves."[45] There were those committed, like Pusey, to a "stationary theology" who therefore preferred safe old errors to progress with the attendant risk of new blunders.

Smith turned his audience's attention to the facts to see whether modern progress in the understanding of the Old Testament was really as illusory as Dr. Pusey had implied. He surveyed the work done in Hebrew philology and in textual criticism since the Renaissance and concluded that in lexicography, grammar, paleography, and comparative linguistics enormous gains had been made. The absolute condition of all such progress, however, had been the freeing of scholars from theological preconceptions about the uniqueness of the Hebrew language or the history of the text of Scripture and the adoption of the basic

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[45] Ibid., p. 473.

assumption of all fruitful historical study--that of the natural, organic development of the phenomena under consideration.

> In the matter of text criticism, just as in matters of verbal philology, it is possible to observe a principle underlying the progress of recent enquiry. Grammatical knowledge took the shape of a steadily growing science when scholars ceased to look on the Hebrew tongue with a superstitious reverence, and began to view it as an organic development, possessing structural unity, and bearing within it traces of a regular growth and decay, and marks of natural relationship to other languages. In like manner the doctrine of the text remained unscientific as long as it was not clearly apprehended that the present state of the text is the outcome of a history, which, in all its steps is perfectly natural, and so can be explored by ordinary methods of scientific study.[46]

If such undoubted progress could be made in the recovery of the Old Testament text and its meaning through the assumption of a natural, organic, continuous development, was it not feasible that study under a similar assumption would open up a new, more adequate understanding of the history of revelation itself? Certainly so, was Smith's ready answer.

> Modern theological science is altogether in the right, when it insists that the Bible must be studied by the aid of the same principle of historical continuity which is employed in the examination of other records of the past. The Bible has, as it came into our hands, something of a fragmentary character. It is a loose collection of parts, not arranged in any systematic form. It is the business of Biblical science to reach the sense of the individual parts by careful exegesis so as to bring out the continuous historical progress in the ways of God to man.[47]

Now what is most interesting in Smith's discussion of this matter was the way it revealed his conception of the relation of God and man in history. "The possibility of Revelation and the possibility of Redemption depend on the truth," said Smith, "that man is capable of growing into a personal relation to God, without any violence done to

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[46] Ibid., p. 485. [47] Ibid., p. 488.

the faculties of his nature."[48] Or again he wrote: "It is clear that no personal relation can be constituted through a process that does violence to the laws of human personality. I cannot find a personal Redeemer in the Bible, unless the whole course of the manifestation of God set forth in the Bible is true to my own nature."[49] If the history of revelation has a supernatural aspect it "is also natural insofar as the relation constituted is a genuine moral relation, a relation which grows up in strict accordance with every psychological law of the human soul."[50] It appears that Smith viewed man as enjoying a natural capacity for knowledge of God and a large measure of autonomy in establishing any relation with God. He speaks very confidently of a law of human nature, a psychological law, to which God, if he is to be "morally related" to man, must subject Himself. If the student of the Old Testament will study its religion "completely from the side of psychology and human history, the divine elements will take their proper place of themselves."[51] For a man proud to be called a son of Calvin these statements suggest a very questionable sort of anthropology. It was against revelation understood in such anthropocentric terms that Karl Barth aimed his guns in the twentieth century and demanded of theology a 180 degree turn. Since there was no one in the Free Church of Smith's day astute enough to see the implications of Smith's speculation on the relations of the truth of God to the man of history we can only wonder how he might have responded to these questions which Barth has addressed to the tradition in which Smith stood. Barth asked:

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[48] Ibid., pp. 487-88. [49] Ibid., p. 487.

[50] Ibid. [51] Ibid., p. 489.

> Does the truth of God confront man also in history? Does it stand there as a reality which is different from man himself and which can really confront him? Does it convey a knowledge which man in no way can create and establish for himself, the givenness of which is demonstrated every moment because it is given to him not by his own knowing, although and while it is given for his knowing, but is given through his being known by it and in it? Is the revelation history because and while it pleases God to reveal himself in history? And is this divine "pleasure" a problem which man could never for an instant be in a position to consider solved? Or is history revelation because and while it pleases man so to consider history, to set God firmly in the history and to have him there, firmly fixed? Has man access to the truth of God in history as he has or thinks he has access to history in general, by interpreting history in the light of the truth which is within himself or which becomes his?[52]

The question must then be asked whether the God that Smith allowed to reveal Himself in terms of the "organic continuity of history" and of the "moral and psychological laws of human nature" was not simply one more example of the all too human propensity for generating idols. Then, too, the question might well be asked of the Barthians, and often is asked, how they propose to reconcile the autonomy of the historian and the presuppositions of his method with a God who in sovereign grace confronts man in history. Strangely enough the solution to that problem as Barth formulated it[53] is not at all unlike the position we find Smith taking in 1878 in his Answer to the Form of Libel.

His primary purpose in that statement was to show the Church

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[52]Karl Barth, "The Word in Theology from Schleiermacher to Ritschl," Theology and Church, trans. by Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 201.

[53]I have in mind such factors as Barth's view of Scripture as a fallible witness to the Word of God or of Scripture as containing the Word of God, of the contrast he makes between personal and propositional truth, and the distinction he draws between Historie, events amenable to historical science, and Geschichte, "events" like the Creation or the Resurrection, portrayed in space and time but not open to historiographical investigation.

that the method he used and the conclusions he reached as a Biblical critic were not incompatible with the Westminster Confession of Faith.[54] The Confession speaks of the Old and New Testaments as "the Word of God written . . . given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life." (Chap. I, sec. 2) It speaks of the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek as "being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages. . . ." (Chap. I, sec. 8) Obviously the crucial words here are "inspiration" and "Word of God." As to "inspiration," Smith distinguished his position from those who understood it as an "influence of the Holy Spirit on the writers in actu scribendi."[55] He emphasized rather that it was scripture itself, not the sacred penman, which was inspired.

> The Bible is recognized as the inspired Word of God, . . . because in the Scriptures the revelation of God and of His will first preached by the apostles and prophets is now reduced to writing; and . . . because the witness of the Spirit by and with the word in our hearts, assures us that in these Scriptures . . . God still speaks to us.[56]

The advantage of this way of understanding the Confession, which Smith tried to show was the thought of other Reformation Confessions as well,

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[54]The Westminster Confession of Faith was composed by the Assembly of Divines convened by the Long Parliament in Great Britain in 1643. The Confession was adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647.

[55]This was the position being championed by the Princeton theology. A classical formulation was that of Alexander A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield in their paper titled "Inspiration," Presbyterian Review, II (1881), 225-60. They define inspiration as "the superintendence by God of the writers in the entire process of their writing, which accounts for nothing whatever but the absolute infallibility of the record in which the revelation, once generated, appears in the original autographs." P. 226.

[56]W. Robertson Smith, Answer to the Form of Libel now before the Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1878), pp. 20-21.

was that it gave no theory about the way in which the Word of God was actually reduced to the written form in which we now have it; nevertheless, the present text, whatever its lineage, is the text now inspired of God.

> This unanimous doctrine of the Reformed Church is so constructed as to make the authority of the Bible altogether independent of questions that may be raised as to the human agencies by which the book came into its present form. According to the Confessional doctrine it is not a matter of faith, when the books that record God's Word were written, or by whom they were written, or how often they were re-edited, changed, or added to, before the record of revelation was finally completed, or in what literary form they are cast, or what modes of literary handling they display, or what their literary merits and demerits may be judged to be. It is not even asserted by the Confession that the persons who gathered and arranged the material of the Bible were under a special influence of God's Spirit, but only that under God's singular care, lest any age should be left without a full unmistakable declaration of His saving will, the record of His revealed Word has been so framed and preserved, that He still speaks in it as clearly as He spake by the Apostles and Prophets, and that we, by the witness of the Spirit, still recognize it as a word breathed forth by God Himself.[57]

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[57] Ibid., p. 21. Among the most perceptive critiques of Smith's view of inspiration is the following. Speaking of Smith and several theologians who were influenced by him the author said: "These writers suppose that the term 'inspiration' as applied to Scripture denotes simply the fact that the Bible is a means of grace through the influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart. This, according to them, constitutes its 'inspiration.' On this view we recognize the divine origin and truth of the Scripture by the Spirit's Witness through its saving power, and it is this saving power which gives the Scripture its authority, and which constitutes its 'inspiration.' In this way the idea of inspiration is lowered by the attempt to determine its nature, not by exegesis, but by asking what we find the Bible to be. Hence our idea of Scripture is substituted for that of the Bible concerning its own nature, and Scripture is regarded as a rule of faith only in so far as it is a means of grace. The Witness of the Spirit, therefore, instead of confirming the authority of Scripture, as it did in the Reformed Theology, becomes a means of erecting a subjective norm above the Bible, thus doing away with its authority as a rule of faith. Moreover the Witness of the Spirit, being thus reduced to the experience of the saving power of the Scripture, is supposed to be given directly or immediately to so much of the historical element in the Bible as our Christian consciousness finds essential. This essential part, it is supposed, will be left untouched by historical criticism which may do as it pleases with the supposedly non-essential parts of Scripture. In this

The manner in which Smith understood the expression "the Word of God" requires considerable explication. The Word of God, following the language of the Confession, Smith defined as God's commands, threatenings, and promises addressed to our faith,[58] but it should be noted that he sharply distinguished between the Word of God and Holy Scripture. Scripture, he was wont to say, records, conveys, or contains the Word of God. On this point he again claimed the support of the Confession. Chapter I, section 1, reads: "Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in diverse manners to reveal Himself, and to declare his will unto his Church; and afterwards, . . . to commit the same into writing, . . ." Here was Smith's warrant for drawing a distinction between the revealed Word of God and the text of Scripture. The line was a fine one but an exceedingly important one for it was the ground for asserting that the Bible as a mere record or conveyance was not itself infallible. Infallibility was an attribute of the Word of God alone. "We cannot . . . say that the infallibility, which belongs to the divine substance of the Word, extends to the outward form of the record, or that the self-evidencing power of the Word as a rule of faith and life extends to expressions in Scripture which are indifferent to faith and life."[59] Smith was prepared to say "Scripture is the Word of God"

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way Christianity is supposed to be rendered independent of the results of historical criticism, in very much the same manner as the Ritschlian theologians believe it to be. A false subjectivism is thus introduced through the mistake of seeking to determine in a subjective way questions which can be settled only by an objective investigation of historical evidence. This entire view rests upon the mistake of supposing that, because saving faith is personal trust and not a mere intellectual assent, therefore its content cannot be given by an objective communication of truth by God." C. Wistar Hodge, "The Witness of the Holy Spirit to the Bible," The Princeton Theological Review, XI (1913), p. 72.

[58] Smith, Answer to the Form of Libel, p. 26. [59] Ibid.

understanding it in the same way in which as a Calvinist he could repeat the Lord's words "This is my body" and not mean thereby what Lutherans and Roman Catholics mean.[60]

The case against Smith rested on the assumption that the Westminster doctrine of Scripture was incompatible with certain conclusions Smith had reached about the dates, authorship, and literary genres of parts of the Bible. Smith's view of revelation, however, allowed him to escape the force of this charge for he did not dispute the authority and infallibility of the Word of God but only of the earthen vessel in which that Word was contained. This point can be made clearer by looking at what Smith had to say about history. The Bible obviously is a book of history giving an account of the origins of the Christian religion. The truth of that history, said Smith, must be tested by ordinary means of historical evidence, means available to any candid thinker without special assistance from God's Spirit. But as the Word of God the Bible "contains something that rises above the analogy of ordinary history." As such it "cannot be gauged or tested by any historical evidence."[61] It is with this extraordinary history (what theologians since Smith's day have come to call Heilsgeschichte) that the Word of God has to do. As normal history the Bible shares the same susceptibility for error as any other historical record. But despite these marks of humanity the Bible is an instrument of revelation. "God has not deemed it unworthy of His honour that in the Bible we read his infallible and self-evidencing Word as presented to us in a vehicle

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[60] Ibid., p. 24. [61] Ibid., p. 22.

which contains some marks of human imperfection, some verbal and historical errors."[62] As the Word of God Scripture eludes all critical study. The truth of the message is not established by science but vouchsafed to the believer by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

Smith's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in certifying the Word of God in the believer's heart was a point on which he apparently had the full support of the Confession. Chapter I, sections 4 and 5 read as follows:

> The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.
>
> We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

To Smith this meant that the authority and infallibility of Scripture was independent of historical criticism, be its findings positive or negative. No truth coming from without could be apprehended except by a power <u>within</u> thus it was only insofar as the believer had the Spirit of God in his heart that he could hear and obey the Word of God. There was perhaps no passage of Scripture that Smith liked more to quote than I Corinthians 2:11. "What man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no

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[62] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 30.

man, but the Spirit of God." The testimony of the Spirit has to do with those things a man could not know by natural means. It has to do with what the Confession called "the knowledge of God and His will which is necessary for salvation."

> So much is witnessed in our hearts by God's own Spirit, and so much is necessarily assumed in our Confession. Everything more than this is a question of the letter, and not of the Spirit, a question of the human agency employed, and not the divine truth conveyed.[63]

The dichotomy which Smith drew between letter and Spirit, empirical history and salvation history, and ultimately between Scripture and the Word of God may or may not be sound theology but in view of what we know of his intellectual biography there can be little doubt that this dualistic epistemology was reinforced for Smith by Kant's separation of the phenomenal and noumenal realms and by Ritschl's division of judgments of fact from judgments of value.[64] Smith, however, thought his

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[63] Ibid. This is the burden, too, of a pamphlet written by Smith's most outspoken ally in the Free Church. See James Candlish, The Authority of Scripture Independent of Criticism (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1877).

[64] This point was clearly perceived and criticized by C. W. Hodge, op. cit., p. 80. "According to the Ritschlian position there is a fundamental dualism between the heart and the head apart from the effect of sin, a dualism which is fatal to Christian faith. What the Ritschlian means to say is that theoretic knowledge is limited to phenomena, and therefore faith has free scope in the sphere of the transcendent objects of religious faith. But this separation of spheres is impossible, and where a rationally grounded faith in God and His supernatural modes of action is given up, one of two positions only remains, each fatal to Christian faith. Either we must say that with the heart we believe in supernatural Christianity although our head tells us it is impossible, in which case faith cannot survive because it cannot be compelled; or else we must reduce our Christianity to the limits of our philosophy and eliminate from it all that Naturalism forbids us to retain. Then we shall have given up supernatural Christianity. We shall not even be able to say that we believe in the Deity of Christ because of His value to the Christian heart, but only that His Deity consists in His value to the Christian heart. Christianity is thus reduced to the basis of the bare natural religious sentiment. In all

position had a yet more venerable ancestry. The leaders of the Reformation, Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli, he said, were bold in their judgments on the letter of Scripture,[65] but that in no way impaired the way in which in simple faith they heard the Word of God in Scripture. The Reformation as Smith interpreted it was a recovery of the personal relation of God and man. The Reformation, therefore, valued the Bible not with the Medieval Church as a compendium of doctrine, but rather as the source of a message of God's personal love for the individual. Enough has been said in other parts of this study about the contrast Smith drew between a propositional view of revelation and a personalistic view. His appeal to this idea was central to his defense before the Church. He particularly stressed the Reformation roots of the view knowing well that the men who would decide his case did not want to be found on the side of Rome.

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this there is a fatal dualism between the head and the heart, between faith and knowledge, which is incurable because rooted in human nature as such, and which does away with the rational basis of all religious faith and tends to reduce the religious consciousness to a merely subjective feeling without any sure objective reference or validity."

[65] Smith, Answer to the Form of Libel, p. 43, where his examples are cited. The Reformer's views on the nature of the inspiration of Scripture continues to be a vexed issue in Reformation studies. See for instance H. Jackson Forstman, Word and Spirit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), or Edward A. Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952). Conservatives find in Luther and Calvin support for their doctrine of inerrancy while Neo-Orthodox theologians take a position more akin to Smith's. The view is sometimes advanced that the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith entails acceptance of radical Biblical criticism. Just as Luther destroyed a false human security in good works so all confidence in the truth of Christianity based on historical evidences must be given up so that faith alone establishes the point of contact with God. Van A. Harvey, The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966).

The main thrust of Smith's defense was that historical research cannot touch the substance of revelation. His particular critical theories, then, were designed to overcome difficulties encountered in the more traditional way of reading the text as a purely historical record.

> When it is found that the old view about any part of Scripture leads to obvious incongruities or irreconcilable contradictions, the critic argues that these contradictions must lie not in the history but in his own standpoint. And if the difficulty cannot be overcome by a more correct exegesis, he prepares himself to ask whether there is not some mistake in what he has hitherto taken for granted about the manner, the purpose, or the date of the book with which he is dealing.[66]

If the conservatives in his Church could not prove conclusively that Smith's teachings were contrary to the Confession it must at least be said in their behalf that they grasped the meaning of Christianity as an historical religion in a way that Smith did not.[67] If Smith

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[66] Ibid., p. 40.

[67] We do not mean to imply that the discussion that centered around the Smith case was carried on with a full appreciation for all the difficult hermeneutical issues which have come to complicate so much Biblical scholarship today. For the most part anti-Smith writers based their opposition on what they considered to be inconsistencies and oversights in Smith's reconstruction of Biblical history. Many of them also laid great weight on the New Testament use of the Old Testament. Typical was the argument of Robert Watt in The New Apologetic and its Claim to Scriptural Authority (Edinburgh: John MacLaren & Son, 1879). Smith, he wrote, "is fond of syllogisms, and cannot object to this method of dealing with the question he has raised touching the objective reference of faith. Major: Faith receives whatever Christ says on any subject. Minor: Christ says that no word or clause of the Old Testament can be broken. Conclusion: Faith receives the entire Old Testament as true." P. 18. The most scholarly rebuttals to Smith came from two American writers. See William Henry Green, "Prof. Robertson Smith on the Pentateuch," The Presbyterian Review, III (1882), 108-56, and S. I. Curtiss, Levitical Priests. A Contribution to the Criticism of the Pentateuch (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1877). The later book is interesting for while it mentions Smith in the preface the body of the book is a sustained attack on Abraham Kuenen yet in a letter dated 18 December 1877 Smith referred to Curtiss as "the first

refused to sever the Word of God from Scripture (all Scripture, he said, conveys God's Word) it can still be fairly asked if he did not separate the Word of God from history--a matter of no small importance. He explicitly denied this intention but the question remains whether he gave a really viable answer to the question the late nineteenth century was asking about the connection of historical revelation to the contents of the Bible. Smith and other proponents of the view that the Bible is a fallible witness to a genuine revelation must still reckon with historical facts. The Christian Faith cannot be severed from a bedrock of historical data. As Emil Brunner has pointed out, "in the sphere of historical science a conflict with faith is always a possibility. Biblical theology is not only a theology of the Word, but also of facts, . . . which are at the same time the object of historical research."[68] Brunner contends that sound historical criticism has destroyed nothing "essential to faith." He is prepared to admit, however, that in theory historical science could come into conflict with such essentials of the faith as the crucifixion of Christ. This possibility is a tension with which the Christian must live. In faith he must hold to the historical, i.e., factual and objective, truth of his creed while admitting that theoretically historical study could

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respectable and scholarly (tho' stupid) antagonist who has arisen against me." W. R. Smith to Irving Smith, Smith MSS. Smith wrote a review of Levitical Priests for The Scotsman, 29 December 1877, in which he charged that Curtiss' "unnatural," "precarious," and "disconnected" solutions to the difficulties raised by higher criticism was not equal to the task of dealing with the "systematic series of difficulties" and "the phalanx of mutually supporting difficulties" on which the higher critical reconstruction was built.

[68]Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, trans. by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 281f.

contradict the facts which are a part of his faith. To live in the shadow of this doubt, to accept the tension, would certainly seem more true to the spirit of historic Christianity than to fly from the world of objective fact to a mystical theology of the Word.[69] Smith was not unaware of this danger. Speaking of God's special and historical revelations of Himself, he wrote:

> We must ultimately come back to a point when it was new, acquired . . . by some particular man or circle of men, who as they did not learn it from their predecessors, must have got it by personal revelation from God Himself. To deny that Christianity can ultimately be traced to such acts of revelation . . . involves in the last resort a denial that there is any true religion at all, or that religion is anything more than a mere subjective feeling.[70]

But such caution notwithstanding it seems to this writer that Smith's removal of revelation from the arena where it could be touched by the historians' tools was a move toward a modern form of Docetism.

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[69]For an excellent discussion of this problem in the context of modern theology see Alan Richardson, History: Sacred and Profane (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1964). He charges Tillich, Barth, Bultmann, and Brunner (on the basis of his early writings) with a "disengagement of theology from history."

[70]W. Robertson Smith, The Prophets of Israel (Edinburgh, A. & C. Black, 1882), p. 12.

CHAPTER V

SMITH AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF PRIMITIVE RELIGION

Though fostered by the eighteenth century's search for the natural man, scholarly study of primitive culture and religion reached an unparalleled intensity in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Concern for the primitive was rooted in the same great obsession with origins that dominated other scientific efforts of the age. The biologist's interest in the origin of species, like the geologist's and astronomer's study of the remote history of the earth and the universe, were expressions of the same Zeitgeist which prompted the quest for the origins of human institutions.[1] This search for origins was one more expression of the nineteenth century's historical mindedness. Moreover, the history of man's social beginnings was a necessary link in the enterprise of charting the course of human culture to its Victorian culmination.

There can be no doubt about the appeal that evolutionary social theories held for nineteenth century thinkers. John Burrow has recently argued that evolutionary pictures of human culture rushed in to fill the void created by the demise of Biblical religion on the one hand and by the collapse of classical liberalism on the other. If the Christian

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[1] Mircea Eliade, "The Quest for the 'Origin' of Religion," History of Religions, 4 (1964), 160.

view of human origins and destiny had been rendered untenable by Biblical criticism and natural science neither could one longer take refuge in the supposedly universal principles of Benthamite psychology or Ricardian economics. Such theories were now admitted to be too parochial to encompass the horizons opened up by historical and anthropological study. On the other hand, interpretations which linked men of all times and of all diverse races in a common process of cultural evolution held out the promise of providing new certitudes in place of the faltering old ones.[2]

The purpose of this chapter will be to relate the religious ideas and social theories of W. Robertson Smith to this Victorian interest in primitive cultures and social evolution. We will look at the context of anthropological theory and controversy in which Smith formulated his own ideas and attempt to identify the concepts and emphases which were peculiarly his. In so doing our concern will be with the results of Smith's research from his paper on "Animal Worship and Animal Tribes Among the Arabs and in the Old Testament" written in 1880 to the delivery of the Burnett Lectures for 1888 under the title, The Religion of the Semites.

Some Antecedent Ideas About Primitive Religion

Prior to the nineteenth century, Christians who thought at all about the matter were likely to appeal to the concept of degeneration in explaining the beliefs and practices of primitive religions. According to this view true religion was not invented, evolved, or discovered

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[2]Burrow, op. cit., pp. 89, 97-98, 102; Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion, p. 4.

by man for on the day of his creation man knew the one Creator--God. Those societies where this pristine revelation was later lacking had confounded the truth with gods of their own invention.[3] As to the alleged existence of certain apparently crude religious concepts in the Bible itself these could be accounted for on the grounds that God in His wisdom and grace had accommodated His revelation to the limited capacities of creatures.[4] In the nineteenth century, however, the manifold religious phenomena of both historical societies and contemporary "primitive" peoples[5] was reinterpreted from the standpoint of evolution. The idea inherited from the Enlightenment that societies are natural systems or organisms having a necessary course of development gave nineteenth century anthropologists confidence that they could construct consistent, logical chains of progression in the religious history of mankind.[6] Robertson Smith could state the idea as succinctly as any of

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[3]Among twentieth century anthropologists Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt was the leading exponent of the primitive montheism hypothesis. See his The Origin and Growth of Religion, trans. H. J. Rose (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1935).

[4]Ibid., p. 20. These words of John Calvin may be taken as representative of the condescension or accommodation argument. "The Anthropomorphites also, who imagined God to be corporeal because the Scripture frequently ascribes to him a mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet, are easily refuted. For who, even of the meanest capacity, does not understand that God lisps, as it were, with us, just as nurses are accustomed to speak to infants? Wherefore such forms of expression do not clearly explain the nature of God, but accommodate the knowledge of him to our narrow capacity; to accomplish which, the Scripture must necessarily descend far below the height of his majesty." Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. by John Allen (7th American Ed.; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, n.d.), I., 13, 1.

[5]It must be borne in mind that the word "primitive" was used not only to refer to pre-historic or early man but also to those living societies which according to contemporary theory were arrested in their development and therefore closely approximated the cultural life of the first rude societies.

[6]E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Essays in Social Anthropology (New York:

its other proponents. "The very probability," he wrote, "of reconstructing the history of human progress rests on the fact that all over the world mankind has been moving in the same general direction, but at various rates, and that careful reasoning aided especially by cases that exhibit a state of transition (e.g., from one kind of kinship to another), enables us to bring out the order in which the various observed types of social structure succeed one another."[7]

Smith's words here also express another of the pervasive assumptions of nineteenth century anthropology. Because societies moved through certain universal stages of progress they could be explored by what was called the comparative method. The fundamental assumption of the comparative method was that practices and beliefs of contemporary primitive or barbaric people resembled those recorded in the early history of civilization. "Modern savage tribes," wrote one practitioner of the method, "in spite of their differences and distance, have in common certain elements of civilization, which seem remains of an early state of the human race at large."[8] It was this research technique that made Robertson Smith think he could find among the nomadic Bedouins of the Near East, especially in records about the pre-Islamic Arab

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Macmillan, 1963), pp. 16-17. It has recently been shown by Burrow, op. cit., that all the founders of evolutionary anthropology--Maine, McLennan, Spencer, Pitt-Rivers, Tylor, and Lubbock--had conceived their basic ideas independently of Darwin's theory of biological evolution.

[7]W. Robertson Smith, Review of The History of Human Marriage by Edward Westermarck, Nature, XLIV (1891), 270-71.

[8]Edward Burnett Tylor, Primitive Culture (2 vols; London: John Murry, 1871), I, 19. Burrow, op. cit., p. 12, attributes this method, as practiced by the mid-century anthropologists, to a revival of the "conjectural history" of the Scottish Enlightenment.

tribes, survivals of the beliefs and social institutions of the prehistoric Semitic peoples. The assumption was that the culture of the desert dwellers had been arrested at a primitive state thus giving the scholar access to a stage of Semitic society more primitive than that even of the Hebrew Tribes as they emerge into history from the pages of the Bible. Contemporary anthropologists have largely disavowed the comparative method and the conclusions to which its practitioners were mistakenly led. The doctrine of a rectilinear course of cultural evolution applicable to all societies has fallen into disrepute. Furthermore, the information on which many nineteenth century armchair anthropologists based their conclusions about latter-day primitives has been shown to have been anything but reliable.[9] We are not called on here, however, to judge the correctness of their views in the light of contemporary anthropological science. Nor should we be so foolish as to think that the influence of a theory is proportioned by its validity. For the historian of ideas at any rate the history of error should not be without interest.

Before Smith made his contribution in the 1880's, the names of F. Max Müller (1823-1900), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), and Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) loomed very large in any discussion of the religion of early man. Smith was acquainted with their various theories and came to differ with them on crucial questions. Müller, Spencer, and Tylor were united in the conviction that primitive religion could

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[9]For a devastating critique of the methods of the early anthropologists see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion, pp. 1-19.

be comprehended in primarily psychological and intellectualist terms.[10] That is, they emphasized the experience of the individual primitive man (as opposed to Smith's concern for the social group), and they looked upon religion as the fruit of primitive man's misdirected efforts to provide a rational explanation for the phenomena of his everyday experience in nature. There were always some practical and intelligible motives behind even the basest superstition. (Smith was a far more subtle analyst of the mind of primitive man and much less impressed with its powers of abstraction and generalization.)

F. Max Müller, son of the romantic poet Wilhelm Müller, was a renowned philologist, one of the leading Sanskritists, and for most of his adult life a scholar in residence at Oxford University. Müller was the leader of the so-called nature-myth school of early religion. He believed that primitive man had a profound sense of the divine, or the infinite (Müller's word for God) which was derived from sensory experience of the overwhelming phenomena and objects of nature. Müller's Hibbert Lectures of 1878 provide us with a convenient summary of his view:

> The infinite, . . . instead of being a late abstraction is really implied in the earliest manifestations of our sensuous knowledge. Theology begins with anthropology. We must begin with a man living on high mountains, or in a vast plain, or on a coral island without hills or streams, surrounded on all sides by the endless expanse of the ocean and screened above by the unfathomable blue of the sky; and we shall understand how, from the images thrown upon him by the senses, some idea of the infinite would arise in his mind earlier than the concept of the finite, and would form the omnipresent background of the faintly dotted picture of his monotonous life.[11]

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[10] These are categories suggested by Evans-Pritchard, ibid.

[11] F. Max Müller, Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1880), p. 38.

Men expressed their feeling for the infinite by fixing on grand natural objects such as the sun and treating these as symbolic representation of the infinite. In a purely metaphorical manner the sun or sky was personified in the religious speech of early men. Müller thought he had found these personifications lurking behind the manifold mythologies found in every culture. The purely metaphoric or symbolic intention of these nature-myths was forgotten at a later stage of cultural history. The stories were then believed to be about divine beings existing in their own right. So reasoning, Müller was led to formulate his thesis that religious mythologies result from a disease of language. Müller's theory described a kind of degeneration from the pristine religious intuitions of primitive men much as older theories had maintained that the ravages of time and human sin had corrupted the primordial revelation. Müller thought he could trace the evolution of religion, at least in the Indo-European area he knew best, from the polytheism of a misunderstood mythology to henotheism, the belief in the unique power of one among many gods. Henotheism led either to atheism (as in the rise of Buddhism) or to monotheism. The latter Müller apparently viewed as a return to something akin to the pristine encounter with infinity that had set the whole religious history in motion. With a flourish that betrayed the romantic background of his thought, Müller defined monotheism as "a new belief in one being, which is the Self of everything, which is not only beyond and beneath all finite things, as apprehended by the senses, but also beneath and beyond our own finite Ego, the Self of all Selfs."[12]

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[12] Ibid., p. 376.

Tylor and Spencer did not share Müller's appreciation of the sublime element in the encounter with nature that stimulated the religion of early man. They were rather of the mid-century generation which drew on an arsenal of more materialistic and positivistic ideas.[13] We know that Auguste Comte worked a decisive influence on both Tylor and Spencer. Further, as Burrow has pointed out, both men came from a kind of nonconformist religious background that ill disposed them to appreciate from the viewpoint of the primitive worshippers themselves the very ritualistic, priestly, religious phenomena about which early anthropologists were wont to speculate.[14] A fact that should also be borne in mind when considering Tylor and Spencer is that both were dedicated social reformers. As Tylor candidly put it at the end of his Primitive Culture, "The science of culture is essentially a reformer's science." For Tylor as for Karl Marx the critique of religion was the beginning of all critiques. "It is," wrote Tylor, "with a sense of attempting an investigation which bears very closely upon the current theology of our day, that I have set myself to examine, among the lower races, the development of animism."[15] The same might well have been said of Herbert Spencer's thought.

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[13]Eliade, "The Quest for the 'Origin' of Religion," pp. 156-57.

[14]Burrow, op. cit., p. 245. See also Evans-Pritchard's essay "Religion and the Anthropologists" in his Essays in Social Anthropology, especially p. 44 where he writes: "Social anthropology has been the product of minds which, with very few exceptions, regarded all religion as outmoded superstition, suited no doubt to a pre-scientific age and historically justified, like classes in the eyes of the Marxists, for a given period, but now useless, even without ethical value and worse than useless because it stood in the way of a rational regeneration of mankind and social progress."

[15]Tylor, op. cit., I, 21.

Spencer's view of primitive religion is commonly designated "the ghost theory." He argued that the belief in spirits arose from savage man's childish, but understandable, efforts to explain certain commonplace events of personal life. The idea that every man has another, ghostly self was, according to Spencer, an empirically based induction which primitive man made in the following manner:

> From the ordinary absence of the other-self in sleep and its extra-ordinary absences in swoon, apoplexy, etc., the transition is to its unlimited absence at death; when after an interval of waiting the expectation of immediate return is given up. Still the belief is that, deaf to entreaties though the other-self has become, it either does from time to time return or will eventually return.[16]

The dreams which the living had about departed friends confirmed them in their belief in ghostly visitations.

The cult and priestcraft of primitive religion was grounded in man's fear and dread of these ancestor-ghosts. "Since," said Spencer, "in primitive societies relations of enmity both outside the tribe and inside the tribe are more general and marked than relations of amity, . . . the doubles of the dead are more often thought of as foes than as friends."[17] Ghosts repay the enemies and antagonists of their more corporeal days by visiting all manner of disasters, diseases, and accidents on the community of the living. Sacrifices must be offered as gifts to placate the hostile spirits. The development of high gods from ghosts and the formation of priestly hierarchies were readily explained by Spencer's theory. At first it was only to the departed

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[16] Herbert Spencer, Principles of Sociology, (2d ed., 3 vols; New York: D. Appleton, 1920), III, 9. Spencer's argument is a good illustration of what Evans-Pritchard castigates as the "If I were a horse" method of anthropology.

[17] Spencer, op. cit., III, 40.

family head that offerings were made, but when the family multiplied into a tribe, the more powerful ghost of a deceased chief demanded that a special person, a man who had gained repute for success in pacifying the spirits, be made responsible for mediating between the whole community and the etherealized chief. A clerical bureaucracy was not then long in forming. When simple societies joined to form a compound one, the pantheon of gods was elaborated and the priesthood grew into "an organized whole subordinate to an arch priest."[18]

For Spencer totemism was a much less complex phenomenon than it would be for Smith. He believed that the worship of plants and animals was a degeneration from the practice of assigning plant or animal nicknames to people. A powerful man's nickname would sometime be adopted by his whole family and thence become a patronym. Eventually the original function as a nickname would be forgotten. The people of the clan named for the wolf would come to believe they were in fact physically descended from the wolf. The animal ancestor then had to be worshiped on the assumption that animals too have unfriendly, ghostly doubles.[19] Spencer's line of reasoning here is parallel to the thesis of Müller's nature-myth school in that he sees totemism as a kind of disease of language.

Edward Burnett Tylor was a country gentleman of Quaker stock whose interest in anthropology arose in the wake of a trip he took to

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[18] Ibid., p. 150.

[19] Herbert Spencer, "The Origin of Animal-Worship, Etc.," The Fortnightly Review, VII New Series (1870), 535-50.

Mexico for reasons of ill health in young manhood.[20] His major publications came early and fast; Anahuac in 1861, Researches in the Early History of Mankind in 1865 and his magnum opus in two volumes, Primitive Culture, in 1871. Like Spencer, Tylor looked for the rational, if erroneous, basis on which primitive superstition rested. "We ought," he wrote, "always to look for the practical and intelligent motives for the habits and opinions we find existing in the world."[21]

Tylor's theory about religion can be summed up in the term "animism," a belief in spiritual beings. Early men (at least the more philosophical ones) invented animism to explain to themselves such biological phenomena as dreaming, hallucinations, and cataleptic fits. Tylor claimed that in his research "at the lowest levels of culture" he discovered a deeply ingrained "notion of a ghost-soul animating man while in the body and appearing in dream and vision out of the body." Savages hold this notion, said Tylor, "on the very evident evidence of their senses, interpreted on the biological theory that seemed most reasonable."[22] Thus far Tylor and Spencer seem to be following the same line. Where Tylor differed was in his belief that primitive man, having discovered the soul, went on to infer that the properties and behavior of all animate and inanimate objects alike could be explained by their endowment with soul life. All the movements of nature were the result of the spirit forces animating it.

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[20]Robert R. Marett, Tylor (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1936).

[21]Edward B. Tylor, "The Religion of Savages," The Fortnightly Review, VI (1866), 86.

[22]Tylor, Primitive Culture, I, 451.

Acts of cultic sacrifice had their place in animistic religion on the assumption that the holocaust liberates the soul of the animal or object so that it can be enjoyed by the spirit of a deceased man or, at a later stage of religious evolution, by a hungry god.[23] The essence of sacrifice for Tylor as for Spencer (and here Smith stood in radical opposition to both) was in the idea of a gift to the spirit deity. More subtle ideas such as homage to the deity or self-abnegation of the worshipper who had deprived himself of an object were simply refinements of the basic gift theory of sacrifice.[24]

Smith's thinking was stimulated by the men we have just discussed, especially Tylor, but an influence of an entirely different magnitude was exercised on him by his fellow countryman John Ferguson McLennan (1827-1881).[25]

McLennan was a Cambridge educated barrister practicing in Edinburgh. While Smith was still a divinity student he made McLennan's acquaintance and the two formed a close friendship on the basis of common interests and similar cast of mind.[26] McLennan, no less combative than Smith,[27] was one of Smith's most ardent non-clerical champions in

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[23]Tylor, "The Religion of Savages," The Fortnightly Review, VI (1866), 71-86.

[24]Tylor, Primitive Culture, II, 340-41.

[25]There are no adequate studies of McLennan's place in nineteenth century intellectual history. Brief discussions of his theories will be found in Robert H. Lowie, The History of Ethnological Theory (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1937), pp. 43-49, and Burrow, op. cit., pp. 228-41. See also J. M. Rigg, "McLennan, John Ferguson," Dictionary of National Biography, XXXV, 210-11.

[26]See the long extract of a letter Smith wrote to McLennan in 1871 in Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 144-45.

[27]Lowie, op. cit., p. 44, wrote of McLennan that "his

the years of the trial.[28] Of present interest though is the fact that from McLennan, Smith derived both his methodology and some of his basic assumptions about primitive societies.

It was his work on the article "Law" for the eighth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica that drew McLennan into ethnological research and speculation. He found himself unable to accept the theory, then championed by Sir Henry Maine, that modern society and the state had evolved from a primordial patriarchal family. In his major work, Primitive Marriage (1865), McLennan challenged this prevailing notion, postulating instead the priority of small promiscuous groups in which kinship was first recognized through the female line. He supposed a matriarchate had everywhere preceded a patriarchate, the patrilinear family being a relatively late human invention. In fact families in the modern sense had been preceded by forms of group life of a quite different order. Before treating at length the substantive ethnology that Smith imbibed from McLennan, we must investigate the method by which McLennan claimed to be able to throw light on the dark limbo of human cultural evolution which lies before the dawn of written history.

For McLennan a first principle for anthropology was that "all the races of men have had, to speak broadly, a development from savagery

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independence was coupled with a pugnacity that barred fairness to his opponents. Worse than that he loved to practice dialectics in vacuo, to speculate about conditions not only unknown but unknowable."

[28]McLennan was the author of a series of letters written in June 1877 to The Scotsman (Edinburgh) in which under various assumed names he satirized the positions of several parties involved in the trial.

of the same general character."[29] Since the development from savagery had not occurred everywhere at the same pace the existing primitive societies of North America, Africa, or Australia were in fact living museums, displaying the state of society at the dawn of history. This principle, with which Robertson Smith and not a few other men of his generation became enamoured, is so important that we must hear McLennan's exposition of it at length.

> In the sciences of law and society, old means not old in chronology but in structure: that is most archaic which lies nearest to the beginning of human progress considered as a development, and that is most modern which is farthest removed from that beginning.
>
> And since the historical nations were so far advanced at the earliest dates to which even philology can lead us back, the scientific investigation of the progress of mankind must not deal with them, in the first instance, but with very rude forms of life still existing, and the rudest of which we have accounts. The preface of general history must be compiled from the materials presented by barbarism. Happily, if we may say so, these materials are abundant. So unequally has the species developed, that almost every conceivable phase of progress may be studied, as somewhere observed and recorded. And thus the philosopher, fenced from mistake, as to the order of development, by the interconnections of the stages and their shading into one another by gentle gradations, may draw a clear and decided outline of the course of human progress in times long antecedent to those to which even philology can make reference.[30]

By following this method, light would be thrown on the background of even the earliest written records of mankind. Such records would be found to contain, disguised under a variety of symbolic forms, the same rude modes of life and forms of law made familiar by the examination of primitive peoples. Thus, reasoned McLennan, "if among the primitive races we find such realities as might pass into such forms on

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[29] John Ferguson McLennan, Studies in Ancient History Comprising a Reprint of Primitive Marriage (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 301.

[30] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

an advance taking place in civility, then we may conclude (keeping within the conditions of a sound inference) that what these now are, those employing the symbols once were."[31] The great appeal of this idea, what E. B. Tylor called the doctrine of survivals, was that it provided a conceptual tool for recovering an otherwise undocumentable past.[32]

The chief area of McLennan's researches was the history of human marriage. He found in the earliest written records available to him allusions to a strange wedding custom which he called "the symbol of capture." This symbol was present whenever after a marriage had been contracted by the consent of the families on both sides it was still required that the groom and his friends feign the act of stealing

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[31] Ibid., pp. 4-5. The attack on the comparative method, at least McLennan's use of it, may be dated from Edward Westermarck's words of 1891. Speaking in reference to McLennan he said, "Nothing has been more fatal to the Science of Society than the habit of inferring, without sufficient reasons, from the prevalence of a custom or institution among savage peoples, that this custom, this institution is a relic of a stage of development that the whole human race went through." The History of Human Marriage (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), p. 2.

McLennan was an accomplished classicist and knew his ancient history well enough but for the description of living primitive societies he was at the mercy of modern travellers and mostly English Protestant travellers at that. For instance his knowledge of North American Indian totemism was derived from the works of Grey, Gay, Gallatin, Long and Williams. These were men that McLennan believed he could "thoroughly trust" for as he said the totem had not yet in their day "got itself mixed up with speculations and accordingly the observers have been unbiased." J. F. McLennan, "The Worship of Plants and Animals," The Fortnightly Review, VI New Series (1869), p. 409. On the way in which the Protestant moorings of such travellers may have prejudiced their accounts see Franz Steiner, Taboo (London: Cohen & West, Ltd., 1956).

[32] For the history of the idea see Margaret Trabue Hodgen, The Doctrine of Survivals (London: Allenson and Company, Ltd., 1936). Miss Hodgen gave to Tylor a rather too exclusive role in the formulation of the doctrine; McLennan used it systematically before Tylor. For a statement of the chastened form in which the whole comparative method is now understood see Evans-Pritchard, The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology (London: The Athlone Press, 1963).

the bride, carrying her away from her relatives by a show of superior force.[33] McLennan surmised that this custom of collusive abduction was a survival of a time when brides were actually captured from neighboring hostile tribes. McLennan's explanation for the prevalence of this barbaric practice was that the demands of the struggle for food and the perpetual state of hostility between tribes placed a premium on sons but made daughters a liability to the group. Therefore, infant daughters were often not allowed to live. But the disturbance in the balance of the sexes caused by this practice of female infanticide made it necessary for young men to prey on neighboring groups for wives.[34] What had arisen as a practical necessity became in the course of time an unreasoned prejudice requiring that a man must not under any circumstances marry within his own primary group. Hence the law of exogamy and its concommitant, marriage by capture, became established custom.

In the primitive horde as McLennan imagined it sexual promiscuity would be the rule. The practice of female infanticide and the rigors of marriage by capture combined to place a great demand on the comparatively few female sexual partners. The males of the horde either agreed to share the favors of the few females or the cohesion of the group could not be maintained. Moreover, these "naked hunters," having no sense of private individual property, could hardly be

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[33] McLennan, Studies in Ancient History, p. 11.

[34] Ibid., p. 76. McLennan's was an essentially utilitarian explanation of exogamy. José Ortego y Gasset has handled the exogamy idea as an illustration of the exuberance of appetite and plenitude of energy characteristic of the young. See his essay "The Sportive Origin of the State," History as a System (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1941), pp. 13-42.

expected to believe in monogamy. (The idea perhaps says more about McLennan's conception of marriage than about the savage's.) Then, too, since observation bore out the fact that "savages are unrestrained by any sense of delicacy from a copartnery of sexual enjoyments, . . ."[35] McLennan could but conclude that sexual promiscuity was the norm in early societies. But the real importance of this state of affairs for McLennan's theory was that under such circumstances kinship could be calculated only through the maternal line. Paternity was always uncertain.

As McLennan viewed it, kinship in primitive society was far different from what it is in civilized society. In primitive society kinship was not based on family membership and hence a matter of degrees of relationship; rather it was an absolute quality based on participation in the common blood of a clan or totem gens. Under this arrangement, however, husband and wife are not blood kin nor are fathers and children of one blood. Only mothers and their offspring are of the same blood, that is members of the same clan.

Under the rule of exogamy the mothers in each horde would be foreigners and since in polyandrous circumstances kinship could only be calculated maternally the children would be foreigners as well. Thus the horde in the course of time would become heterogenous, consisting of members of the several stocks common to contiguous groups. In these

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[35] McLennan, Studies in Ancient History, p. 91. McLennan's work has not withstood the barrage of ethnographic facts that have been thrown against it. As Lowie has pointed out, it is not the case that perpetual hostility is the rule among primitive peoples or that polyandry and female infanticide are normal or widely prevalent; matriliny does not occur among the majority of the rude races, even among the Australian aborigines nor is kinship necessarily understood in terms of blood relationship. Lowie, op. cit., pp. 43-49.

circumstances brides would no longer have to be captured by force but could be obtained from the foreign stock now living within the horde. So the rule of exogamy, though thus modified, continued in force. The question McLennan then had to answer was how the rule of exogamy could be made to operate in the now heterogenous tribe.[36] He found his answer in what he supposed to be the universal conjunction of exogamy and totemism; the latter word, like the former, came into wide usage largely through McLennan's employment of it.

Totemism, a word derived from the Algonquin language, was used by McLennan to describe any relationship supposed to exist between a group of kindred people and some species of objects, usually plants or animals. The objects themselves were called the totems of the human group. On McLennan's theory the totem functioned as the symbol or

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[36] McLennan, "Exogamy and Endogamy," The Fortnightly Review, XXVII (1877), p. 885. An interesting sidelight on this matter of exogamy is revealed in W. Robertson Smith, Review of The History of Human Marriage by Edward Westermarck, Nature, XLIV (1891), 270-71. In this review Smith was at pains to discredit Westermarck's subordination of human behavior, especially marraige patterns, to "natural history," that is to purely biological categories. For instance, Westermarck viewed the incest taboo as an acquired instinct. For Smith, human marriage evolved under the direction of customs and laws hence he wrote with approval of his friend McLennan ". . . who in all his investigations gives weight to the action of human intelligence as the decisive factor in human progress." There are two rival conceptions of progress implicit in Smith's controversy with Westermarck. With characteristic felicity of expression Carl Becker spoke of the two sides to this kind of controversy. "The conception of progress rests," he wrote, "on the belief that man can, by taking thought, add a cubit to his stature, or else that a cubit will be added whether he takes thought or not." Review of The Idea of Progress by John Bury, American Historical Review, XXVI (1920), p. 77. The second of these two conceptions of the mode of progress predominated in the nineteenth century. Though the Enlightenment had formulated the first conception, Smith was happier with it. He disliked any approach to history which subordinated men to impersonal forces or instincts.

ensign by which in a group having kinship through mothers only the several stocks or totem-tribes remained distinct and thus rendered enforceable the law prohibiting marriages between members of the same totem group.[37]

The totem in McLennan's view could not be merely symbolic. It must rest on a more concrete idea for symbols in primitive thinking are always survivals of earlier literal or material conceptions. Since he found among his more contemporary primitives a belief in actual descent from a totem forbear, McLennan suspected there was a "reality" standing behind the totem symbols of ancient man as well. The exploration of this reality was to be the task of McLennan's friend and disciple, Robertson Smith.

The Presuppositions and Methodology of Smith's Study of Semitic Religion

There is in the writings of McLennan and the other ethnologists of his generation a disconcerting vagueness about the precise antiquity of the matters they thought they were describing. Smith was no exception. He used expressions like "the childhood of humanity" or "early man" without ever providing any more precise chronology. It is

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[37] McLennan, "The Worship of Plants and Animals," The Fortnightly Review, VI (1869), 407-27, and VII (1870), 194-216. The classic study of the interrelationship of totemism and exogamy, based on ethnographical and religious data from all over the world, is James George Frazer, Totemism and Exogamy (4 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1910). Frazer was a Scot who came out of a family and religious background much like Smith's. His father, fearing that his son's Presbyterian orthodoxy would be sullied at Oxford, sent him to Cambridge where he became Smith's close friend. Frazer's work on totemism was the outgrowth of the article that he wrote on the subject under Smith's tutelage for the Encyclopedia Britannica. On Frazer see Robert Angus Downie, James George Frazer (London: Watts & Co., 1940).

remarkable, too, that Smith made no effort to relate his discussions about prehistoric man to Darwinism or even to render any judgments on that theory which vexed so many minds of his generation. He was apparently more interested in primitive man's belief in his kinship with the animal kingdom than with the corresponding belief of modern biologists.[38] He was, of course, completely ignorant of the great antiquity of human civilization in the Near and Middle East. Archaeology since Smith's day has pushed the history of sedentary communities in that area back several millenia. The Hebrew patriarchs, in Smith's view the immediate descendants of very primitive peoples, must now be viewed against a background of at least two thousand years of civilization. This fact alone casts a pall over Smith's facile linking of primitive and Biblical religion.

Though he frequently used corroborative data drawn from classical history and from observations of modern "primitives," strictly speaking Smith's field of interest was the ancient Semitic peoples and their religion. The Semites, a group of linguistically related societies, included the Arabs, Hebrews, Phoenicians, Arameans, Babylonians, and Assyrians. Smith was of the persuasion that these several peoples

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[38] Smith seemingly held to the doctrine of special creation at least as regards man. Writing in 1877 he said: "If history and psychology have a voice at all they declare to us that man was not developed by chance from the lower creation, but came complete from the hands of God Himself. . . ." In the following paragraph he cautioned against a too literal reliance on the relevant Biblical passages. Lectures and Essays, p. 411. In his article "Eve," Encyclopedia Britannica, VIII, 733-34, he admitted the difficulties of a strictly literal interpretation of the creation narrative of Genesis but rejected the mythical interpretation as incompatible with the obviously historical intention of the narrative.

emerged from a common stock which had its origin in the vast Arabian peninsula. The physical isolation of that region militated against immigration and thus insured the purity of its indigenous culture.[39] The societies of pre-Islamic Arabia gave the scholar access to a state of Semitic culture as primitive as that of the race before its differentiation into the several historical societies. At least such was Smith's belief and made him confident of his ability to treat "Semitic religion as a whole in its common features and type."[40]

In the discussion that follows we have of necessity had to bypass the many interesting illustrations drawn from Semitic history with which Smith buttressed his broad generalizations. It could be fairly said, on the other hand, that Smith's argument seemed sometimes to develop with too little regard for concrete historical data and with too great confidence in the historian's power of drawing out the logical inferences of an assumed pattern of evolution. Wellhausen once commented on this characteristic of Smith's work saying he had a remarkable "power of constructing an entire enchanting picture out of fragments

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[39] W. Robertson Smith, The Religion of the Semites (2d. ed.; New York: Meridian Books, 1956), pp. 9-10. Hereafter cited as Religion of the Semites.

[40] Ibid., p. 1. Smith's confidence in drawing on Arabian sources for a pure Semitic religion is no longer shared by all investigators. Alfred Guillaume, Prophecy and Divination Among the Hebrews and Other Semites (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1938), pp. 61-80, discusses the difficulties inherent in Smith's idea while Sabatino Moscati, The Semites in Ancient History (Cardiff: Wales University Press, 1959), p. 31, takes a position more akin to Smith's. Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel (2 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), vol. I, pp. 3-4, gives qualified endorsement to the comparative method, utilizing pre-Islamic Bedouin data.

and single traits. . . ."[41] It was alas a talent Smith possessed to a fault.

It would be an error to think that it was only after he had lost his Old Testament Chair that Smith turned to a broad, comparative approach to ancient religions. On the contrary his later research was an outgrowth of matters that had concerned him from the first. There is ample indication in his lecture notes from 1870 to 1876 that he believed the Old Testament could only be understood when placed against a broader historical background and that he was already seeking extra-Biblical parallels for the legal and cultic traditions of Israel. But it was not until 1880 that he turned his full attention to what can be called comparative religion. Before studying the evolution of Smith's major contribution to comparative religious studies, that is his concept of totem sacrifice, we will look at certain broad principles of methodology and interpretation with which he approached his research. In so doing we will be concerned to demonstrate the continuity of viewpoint between Smith's early theological and Biblical studies and his later approach to anthropological data.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that Smith based his picture of the evolution of Semitic religion on the premise of the correctness of a particular school of Old Testament criticism. Since the work of Kuenen and Wellhausen, Biblical scholarship, Smith said, was at "a point where nothing of vital importance for the study of Old Testament

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[41]Quoted in John F. White and William Duguid Geddes, Two Professors of Oriental Languages (Aberdeen: University Press, 1899), pp. 33-34.

religion still remains uncertain."[42] The most important conclusions that Smith based on the Wellhausenian schema of Israelite history concerned evolution of sacrificial ritual and its meaning. In the earliest strata of Biblical materials, worship, as with early religion generally, was centered on a joyous sacrificial meal in which God and His people entered into a communion unclouded by any feeling of alienation due to human sin. Smith described this stage of religion as follows:

> The identity of religious occasions and festal seasons may indeed be taken as the determining characteristic of the type of ancient religion generally; when men meet their god they feast and are glad together, and whenever they feast and are glad they desire that the god should be of the party. This view is proper to religions in which the habitual temper of the worshippers is one of joyous confidence in their god, untroubled by any habitual sense of human guilt, and resting on the firm conviction that they and the deity they adore are good friends, who understand each other perfectly and are united by bonds not easily broken. . . . In a religion of this kind there is no room for an abiding sense of sin and unworthiness, or for acts of worship that express the struggle after an unattained righteousness, the longing for uncertain forgiveness.[43]

Though he claimed the support of higher criticism's redating of the Biblical documents, Smith's statement here is heavily indebted to his theory, which we will elaborate later, that gods, men, and sacrificial

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[42] The Religion of the Semites, p. vii. Smith's unbounded confidence is not shared by the present generation of Old Testament scholars. As one of them describes the present state of things: "The whole field is in a state of flux. It is moving, certainly, but it is not always easy to say in what direction. Sometimes it gives the impression that it is moving in several mutually canceling directions at once. . . . Indeed, perhaps the only safe generalization possible is that the critical orthodoxy of a generation ago, with its apparent certainties and assured results, has gone. . . ." John Bright, "Modern Study of the Old Testament Literature," The Bible and the Ancient Near East, ed. George Ernest Wright (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), p. 2.

[43] Religion of the Semites, pp. 255-56. cf. Wellhausen, Prolegomena . . ., pp. 80-82.

animals were once regarded as belonging to the same natural community. In such a religion the deity is not a remote, wrathful being who must be placated. Smith was, therefore, much opposed to any view of primitive religion that made fear or a sense of estrangement the essential motivation of the worshipper. "It is not with a vague fear of unknown powers, but with a loving reverence for known gods who are knit to their worshippers by strong bonds of kinship, that religion in the only true sense of the word begins."[44]

Ideas of sacrifice as a gift or tribute intended as expiation for sin were much later developments in religious history. In fact conceptions involving the appeasement of the wrath of God did not arise in the Hebrew kingdoms until they had been laid waste by their Assyrian and Babylonian conquerors. It was under circumstances that threatened their extinction as a people, when the God of the Fathers had apparently repudiated them, that the Levitical cultus of the Priestly Code with its concern for the expiation of sin came into existence. "The nations of Palestine in the seventh century B.C.," wrote Smith, "afford an excellent illustration of the development of a gloomier type of worship under pressure of accumulated political disasters."[45] Or again, he wrote:

> In the last days of the kingdom of Judah and still more after the Exile, piacular sacrifices and holocausts acquired a prominence which they did not possess in ancient times. The old history knows nothing of the Levitical sin-offering; . . . The holocaust,

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[44] Ibid., pp. 54-55. In this context Smith attributes the opposing view to Renan but he might as appropriately have quoted certain passages from Tylor or Spencer.

[45] Ibid., p. 258.

> although ancient, is not in ancient times a common form of sacrifice. . . . The distressful times that preceded the end of Hebrew independence drove men to seek exceptional religious means to favor a deity who seemed to have turned his back on his people.[46]

The old communal feast that had once accompanied every act of animal slaughter gave way to the Deuteronomic centralization of an official cult, the elaboration of a complex priesthood, and the interpretation of the sacrifice as a means of conjuring the divine wrath. The Book of Leviticus for all the fulness of its ritual detail does not furnish an accurate picture of the early meaning and forms of sacrificial worship.[47] The comparative method was the key to unlock the more primitive Semitic religious practice and Wellhausenian criticism conveniently arranged the Biblical documents in a corroborating evolutionary pattern.

In support of some of his broad interpretive principles Smith was prepared to offer considerable argumentation; others were propounded without elaborate justification. To understand Smith's reliance on principles of the latter type it is useful to return to some of the ideas developed in his early theological essays. There can be little doubt that he approached religion generally with ideas which he had first applied to Christianity alone. His failure to comment on this fact leads one to suspect that he was not always conscious of the extent to which it influenced his work. The key ideas in Smith's approach to primitive religion are remarkably like some of those he had

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[46] Ibid., pp. 237-38. This view of Old Testament sacrifice, which Smith shared with Julius Wellhausen, has been subjected to meticulous examination and devastating rebuttal by R. J. Thompson, Penitence and Sacrifice in Early Israel Outside the Levitical Law: an Examination of the Fellowship Theory of Early Israelite Sacrifice (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963).

[47] Religion of the Semites, p. 216.

earlier seen as basic to Christianity. Primitive religion, at least in its Semitic forms, was rooted in an experience of personal fellowship between man and god. This experience always took place in the context of an organic community so religion could be understood only when viewed in its social environment. Moreover, in understanding religious phenomena the scholar must look not at the mythology or the doctrinal formulations with which the believer explains his experiences to himself but rather to the concrete act of worship, to the pre-articulate ritual. That was where the real meaning of religious life was to be discerned. There were anticipations of each of these broad principles in those early essays written by Smith under the influence of the theological and philosophical trends that had affected him in his youth.

The conception of the Christian life as a close personal relationship of the believer and God was central to Smith's early essays. Again and again he denigrated the idea that Christianity was a frozen theological system resting on a corpus of propositional truth communicated by God to man. Christianity is not a knowledge of facts but knowledge of a person. In revelation God gives Himself.[48] The Christian life is a personal relationship to God in Christ. That this relationship was not based on externalities, on the mere words of Scripture, or on the sacraments of the Church was the great truth recovered by the Reformation:

> The real meaning of every true heart-spoken word is just the opening of the heart to him who speaks. . . . With the Reformation begins a great awakening into the new self-conscious personal life. Luther saw that the Word of God, in which he had learned to live, was no outward letter, but a deep personal thing.[49]

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[48] Lectures and Essays, p. 123. [49] Ibid., p. 225.

Smith saw in the work of the Vermittlungstheologie the nineteenth century recovery of the Reformation insight into the secret of primitive Christianity. But in his later work it appears that Smith devined in the most vital phenomena of earliest religion an anticipation of this Christian consciousness of communion with God. Speaking of animal sacrifice he wrote in 1886: "From the beginning ritual expressed however crudely, certain ideas which lie at the very root of religion, the fellowship of the worshippers with one another in their fellowship with the deity. . . ."[50] In his lectures the following year he wrote that "the fundamental idea of ancient sacrifice is sacramental communion, and that all atoning rites are ultimately to be regarded as owing their efficacy to a communication of the divine life to the worshippers, and to the establishment of a living bond between them and their god."[51] The most common notion of divine-human fellowship in primitive religion was expressed in the belief of the kinship of gods and men. A permanent friendly relationship between a group of men and a supernatural being was possible because they were part of the same natural, kinship community, bound together by a tie of blood. The fatherhood of God, and His communion with men in giving Himself was for Smith not an exclusively Christian conception.

In contrast to his fellow workers who had rooted primitive religious behavior in the psychology of the individual, Smith claimed that religious belief and practice could not be separated from the larger

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[50] "Sacrifice," Encyclopedia Britannica, XXI, 138.

[51] Religion of the Semites, p. 439.

society in which it existed. Men were born into a social and religious environment and their religious ideas were bound to be limited by and conditioned by the social context. Particularly in primitive societies men did not freely choose or frame their religion for themselves. Rather they were born into a circle of obligations and ordinances which were the common inheritance of the whole social group. The young were taught that the good of the community, in fact its continuing existence, depended on their fidelity to the religious prescriptions handed down by the elders. The religious life thus became inextricably bound to the life of the society as a whole. Religion, then, could be understood only when viewed in connection with the fundamental structures of the society in which it operated.

The priority of the community to the individual was not exclusively a characteristic of primitive peoples. Smith had argued eloquently years earlier that in the Christian Church the individual needed the corrective of the mind of the Church as a whole. This was especially true when, as Smith believed, theology was grounded in the Christian's experience rather than in the doctrines of an infallible book. Because of sin and natural limitations, the individual Christian's apprehension of the truth was always partial. Believers must therefore assist and support one another in thinking out their Christianity. They do this in the context of the Church, which in Smith's word was "an organism in which no one can develop save in and through the development of the whole."[52] The individual must find and

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[52] Lectures and Essays, p. 155. Smith's lectures entitled "The Work of a Theological Society," pp. 137-62, and "The Place of Theology in the Work and Growth of the Church," pp. 309-40, are of special relevance to the points we have made here.

maintain his spiritual life within the community of the faithful.[53]

The importance of the community in primitive religious life is seen in that religious concepts are always framed in the social and economic categories of the group. As Smith put it, "the god and his proper worshippers make up a single community, and the place of the god in the community is interpreted on the analogy of human relationships."[54] When the clan or gentes was still the only unit of society the gods would be thought of in terms of human parenthood. Primitive men believed themselves to be children of their god or goddess and that in a completely literal sense.[55] They were of one blood with the deity and, therefore, could count on his protection and succor. But when a people had passed into a higher stage of organization, having founded a monarchical state, their deity would be thought of as a king, the guarantor of peace and justice in the midst of a large and factious community.[56] Polytheistic religion resulted when, as in Greece and Rome, the aristocratic principle triumphed over the monarchic. Monotheism developed when, as in Asia, kingship held its own against the pretentions of an aristocracy. "The diversity of political fortune," wrote Smith, "is reflected in the diversity of religious development."[57]

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[53]The influence of Ritschl may well be the decisive factor in Smith's thought in this connection. See p. 66 supra.

[54]Religion of the Semites, p. 84.

[55]"The circle of common religion and of common social duties was identical with that of natural kinship, and the god himself was conceived as being of the same stock with his worshippers." Ibid., p. 275. See also p. 29.

[56]Ibid., pp. 56, 72.

[57]Ibid., p. 73. Commenting on this sentence E. E. Evans-Pritchard

There was no native Semitic genius for monotheism as Renan believed;[58] all could be explained as the alliance of religion and monarchy.

In a similar manner Smith linked the evolution of religious ideas to the development of a people's economy. The god of the nomad shepherds will have no fixed abode, though he may have his favorite haunts in lush valleys or on a mountain. The god of an agricultural people will have a clearly defined domain of which he will be the baal or Lord. He will manifest his presence most powerfully, however, in an impressive sanctuary.[59] The savage hunters will believe not only in their friendly, familiar gods but in demons or jinn, supernatural, animal-like denizens of the wilderness with whom they have no established relations. But as they settle down to a pastoral or agricultural way of life and subdue nature their god will simultaneously drive away the demons.[60] The savage hunter will have had a firm belief in his consanguinity with a totem-god, a fact which alienates him from all persons not of the totem clan. On entering the pastoral stage he will transfer his notions of sanctity and kinship to the animals he has

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wrote: "All this is a little naive. Andrew Lang's writings and Wilhelm Schmidt's many volumes contain an abundance of evidence that people lacking political office, and therefore a political model for a supreme being, the hunters and collectors, are to a large extent monotheistic. . . ." Theories of Primitive Religion, p. 50.

[58] Ernest Renan, Novelles Considérations sur le Charactère Général des Peuples Semitiques et en particular sur Leur Tendance au Monothéisme (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1859). Smith dealt at length with Renan's view of monotheism in a review of the latter's Histoire du Peuple d'Israël (1887). See Lectures and Essays, pp. 608-22.

[59] Religion of the Semites, pp. 118-19.

[60] Ibid., p. 122.

domesticated. This transition will have as an unsought by-product the opening of the way for the formation of political communities with other sheep, camel, or goat shepherds, communities larger than those based on the older totem-kinship ideas.[61] Economic and religious change are linked in the evolution of sacrifice as well. The transition from the more primitive communion type of sacrifice to the gift type was possible only after the institution of private property had arisen in conjunction with the change from a nomadic to an agricultural society.[62]

It is clear from the foregoing that Smith did not, with the disciples of Comte, interpret the stages of human religious history in primarily intellectual categories. Rather he regarded political and economic change as the more basic cause of religious progress. He may have been influenced in this connection by the Scottish philosophic historians of an earlier generation such as Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and John Millar. These had anticipated Marx rather than Comte in their picture of social evolution.[63] Also like these countrymen of the previous century Smith had an appreciation for what Adam Smith was wont to call "the hidden hand" by which, without man's conscious intention, human institutions were shaped to benevolent ends. While Adam Ferguson could write that "nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design,"[64] Smith could remark in a similar vein that apparently irrational primitive religious taboos, by teaching discipline and communal responsibility,

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[61] Ibid., p. 355.

[62] Ibid., pp. 245, 395.

[63] Burrow, op. cit., p. 10.

[64] Ibid.

unwittingly prepared the way for a higher social and moral order. In a perhaps too flamboyant use of the comparative method Smith observed that even "an English school boy is subject to many unreasonable taboos, which are not without value in the formation of character."[65]

This last idea brings us to one of the concepts which runs throughout The Religion of the Semites. The truth of a religious belief in the sense of its correspondence to reality was not a matter of much interest to Smith. He saw religious beliefs as phenomena of consciousness which had a pragmatic function in social life quite independent of their ultimate veracity. He wanted to know how a belief worked in the community of faith, how it made life endurable and meaningful and most of all how it encouraged ethical behavior in the individual and thereby promoted the life of the group.[66] Undergirding Smith's sociological appreciation of religious "truth" was an epistemology which shifted interest from the propositional content of religious systems to something more rudimentary than knowledge. We can best briefly suggest the nature of this shift by quoting words Smith wrote in 1870, long before he applied the notion to primitive religion. In opposition to all efforts to ground theology in natural reason or historical probability he said:

> The Church is not redeemed by its theology; it theologises because it is redeemed. Theology has done its work when it has given

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[65] Religion of the Semites, p. 154.

[66] Ibid., p. 267. Frazer saw more clearly than did Smith the shift in interest from religious truth to phenomena of consciousness implicit in their study of religion. Downie, op. cit., pp. 10-11. Much of Smith's discussion of religious phenomena is suggestive of what is now styled the sociology of knowledge. An interesting application of this approach to modern Christian theology is Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1967).

> scientific expression to all that is bound up in the consciousness of redemption and the life that flows therefrom.[67]

In other words, a life style, or what Smith called the inarticulate tact and insight of a religion, was more of the essence than were the elaborations of theological truth.

What this "pragmatist" conception of religious truth meant for the study of primitive religion can be discerned in the distinction Smith made concerning the priority of ritual to myth and doctrine. In contrast to Müller, Spencer and Tylor who had looked for the primary doctrine or rudimentary philosophy that had inspired men to devise their rituals, Smith always looked first for the religious deed itself and only secondarily for the explicit consciousness of what the deed implied. Myths, those stories about the gods which were the forerunners of theological doctrine, Smith regarded as naive efforts to explain the meaning of rituals whose true origin was forgotten. The manner of performing the rite was rigorously fixed by immemorial tradition. The mythical explanation, however, was often vague and always subject to wide variation. The selfsame rite would be mythologized by different peoples in different ways. Anthropological research, therefore, must seek first the pre-mythical core. Smith's oft reiterated dictum was, "In the study of ancient religions we must begin not with myth but with ritual and traditional usage."[68]

The reasons for Smith's confidence in this principle can be understood, as we have just suggested above, in the light of influences

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[67] Lectures and Essays, p. 155.

[68] Religion of the Semites, p. 18.

in Christian theology to which he had opened himself as a young man. The distinction between ritual and myth was one expression of a motif running throughout the nineteenth century and very deeply in the Schleiermachian and Ritschlian tradition to which Smith adhered. This school saw immediate life, action, and feeling as prior to and more elemental than reflective thought or objective knowledge. Describing the Schleiermachian revolution in theology Smith could write:

> Theology is no longer the sum of those doctrines by believing which we are united to God in faith and which, from the witness of the Holy Spirit to this their saving power, are received as indubitably true; but the doctrines of theology are the product of faith, the knowledge of the subject and object of faith which are evolved by dialectical necessity from the assurance of the primitive act itself.[69]

For Schleiermacher the feeling which arose from an awareness of absolute dependence on God defied rational description. Not only was it the case that the description "cannot be equal to the thing described," but in addition, "ideas and principles are all foreign to religion." Doctrines, he said, were verbal accounts of the essentially ineffable religious affections. But just as Smith thought an act of worship could be dressed in a multitude of differing mythical cloaks so Schleiermacher could write of religion generally that, "The religious person realizes that his religion is only part of the whole; that about the same circumstances there may be views and sentiments quite different from his but just as pious."[70] Very similar was Albrecht Ritschl's distinction between judgments of fact and judgments of value. Though

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[69] Lectures and Essays, p. 159.

[70] Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, Torchbook edition, 1958), pp. 46-47, 54-55.

again Ritschl was not immediately interested in what became known as the myth versus ritual controversy, still his basic epistemology, distinguishing sharply as it did between the event perceived as revelation and the value judgment evoked by it, had a close parallel in Smith's thought. For Ritschl the words "Jesus Christ dies on Calvary" would be a simple judgment of fact but the subsequent conviction that "we have redemption through His blood" would be an independent value judgment.[71] These distinctions between life and doctrine, between fact and value, are remarkably like Smith's ritual-myth dichotomy in that in each case a brute datum is chronologically prior to the act of reflexion or explanation. The intellectual climate of Smith's age was such that he found no necessity for arguing at length his assumption that the secret of primitive religion was in its earliest ritual praxis and not in the derivative mythology. Goethe had in fact summed up the matter at the beginning of the nineteenth century when he had Faust retranslate the majestic opening words of John's Gospel as "In the beginning was the Deed."[72]

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[71] H. R. Mackintosh, op. cit., pp. 150-51.

[72] "It is written: In the beginning was the Word.
Here I am stuck at once. Who will help me on?
I am unable to grant the Word such merit,
I must translate it differently
If I am truly illumined by the spirit.
It is written: In the beginning was the Mind.
But why should my pen scour
So quickly ahead? Consider that first line well.
Is it the Mind that effects and creates all things?
It should read: In the beginning was the Power.
Yet, even as I am changing what I have writ,
Something warns me not to abide by it.
The spirit prompts me, I see in a flash what I need,
And write: In the beginning was the Deed!"
Goethe's Faust, an abridged version translated by Louis McNeice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 44.

To Smith's reconstruction of the primal deed we can now turn our attention.[73]

The Evolution of Smith's Theory of Sacrifice

There is general agreement that Smith's most original contribution to religious scholarship was his theory of sacrifice. There are at least two reasons why this theory is of special significance. First, Smith was able to show an integral connection between the practice of animal sacrifice and what was then believed to be the most elementary stage of all human social evolution, the totem stage. Second, Smith found the essence of the act of sacrifice not with several other scholars in the fear and appeasement of the deity but rather in a relationship binding men and god together in a circle of communion and heartfelt fellowship.

The original linking of totemistic social schemes and religion was of course not Smith's work. He was always ready to admit his debt to McLennan in that regard. In Smith's own words: "The advantage of J. F. McLennan's totem hypothesis over all previous theories of primitive

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[73]I have attempted in what preceded to elaborate on a suggestion made by one of Smith's former students, S. A. Cook. "For my part," he wrote, "I cannot avoid associating Smith's earlier and later teaching. . . . I cannot help thinking that the course of Smith's purely critical researches in Semitic religion and sociology was swayed however unconsciously by his deep personal religious and theological convictions. . . .

"In his earlier day he had taught that the Christian Church was united by an invisible bond, by the close personal bond between a man and God, every man being a member of the organic Body of Christ. He laid stress on Christian fellowship; practical religion comes first. In his later years, it was the unifying principles of the typical social-religious group that he was demonstrating. Moreover, he upheld the priority of rite and ritual over myth, that is, the priority of the deed over the explicit consciousness of what the deed implied." C. E. Raven and S. A. Cook, Centenary of the Birth on 4 November 1846 of the Rev. W. Robertson Smith (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1951), pp. 14-15.

heathenism is that it does justice to the intimate relation between religion and the fundamental structure of society. . . ."[74] Smith's own achievement was a linking of totemism as a social and religious phenomenonto a particular understanding of sacrificial worship.

As early as 1880 Smith had begun to work on the totem problem. His concern at that time in his paper titled "Animal Worship and Animal Tribes Among the Arabs and in the Old Testament"[75] was to show that the elements of totemism were present in ancient Semitic societies. In his several studies, McLennan had not sought any comprehensive evidence for his views in the Semitic field. To this hiatus in his friend's research Smith brought to bear his own considerable acquaintance with Semitic lore.[76]

In his Arabic materials Smith found evidence that Arabia had passed through a totem stage. All the requisite survivals were present in the documents. He showed the existence of many stocks named after animals. The same animal names were distributed through several tribes, suggesting exogamous marriage customs. Patterns of sexual life, aptly described as polyandrous, seemed to support the slight evidence for a system of matrilineal kinship. The prevalence of female infanticide, which in McLennan's theory was the efficient cause of both exogamy and

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[74] Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia (2nd ed.; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907), pp. 258-59.

[75] Lectures and Essays, pp. 455-83.

[76] As had been the case with several of his early scientific papers Smith presented his research in the interest of advancing the thesis of a friend meanwhile drawing attention to the shortcomings of a rival position. The erring scholar in this case was Count Wolf W. F. Baussidin, a representative of Müller's nature-myth school who had sought to link the early religious ideas of the heathen Semites to the worship of astral bodies.

polyandry, and also the symbol of capture in marriage ceremonies, suggested a time when women were actually stolen from other tribes. It was the presence of these captured wives in a tribe which explained the heterogenous pattern of animal eponyms. The weakest part of Smith's argument, then as later, was the lack of direct evidence that the totem animals in Arabia were actually worshipped as deities.

Turning to the Biblical field Smith thought he could find there traces or survivals of at least some of the elements of totemism he had found among the pre-Islamic Arabs. Both in Israel and among her ancient neighbors Smith found remnants of family names based on animal species and evidence suggesting animal worship.

Most sensational of his assertions was one linking David's family with the serpent clan and with serpent worship. Among David's ancestors was Nahshon, or the Great Serpent; David's sister, Abigail, was called the daughter of Nahush, the Serpent. This suggested to Smith that the family of Jesse, David's father, was the serpent clan. The homage that David's family paid to the serpent was seen in that there was a brazen serpent in the courtyard of the temple after David's time (2 Kings 18:4) and that the Serpent Stone was the site of Adonizah's coronation (1 Kings 1:9). David enjoyed friendly relations with an Ammonite king, who might have been expected to be a bitter enemy, but who, since he bore the name of Son of the Serpent, was David's ally. "The common serpent-stock," said Smith, "was a stronger bond than all motives of national hostility."[77]

Instances of actual animal worship were not lacking in Biblical

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[77] Ibid., p. 482.

tradition (though, again, that these animals were survivals of tribal totems is pure assumption on Smith's part). He found particularly compelling the account in Ezekiel 8 of the seventy elders of Israel worshipping in a chamber, the walls of which were covered with figures of "creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel."

Smith discovered what he believed were remnants of matrilineal kinship, exogamy, and marriage by capture in the Old Testament. Notice that there was a constellation of factors which he had been taught by McLennan to expect in the totem stage of social evolution. Missing or incomplete pieces in the puzzle could be confidently postulated; McLennan's system was so harmonious that logic demanded the existence of all factors. If the Arabian evidence was most complete it was because the Arabian society in question was in fact more primitive (in development, not chronologically) than the society reflected in Biblical literature. Smith pronounced the evidence for a totemistic stage in Semitic history "remarkably confirmatory of Mr. McLennan's theory."[78]

The Arabic materials available to Smith in Edinburgh were severely limited, but after his move to Cambridge he took up his research again with the result that a full-scale study of the social background of Arabian totemism was published in 1885 under the title Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia. The whole burden of this very detailed and difficult book is to show that exogamy, the rule requiring men to find wives outside the boundaries of their primary group, and

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[78] Ibid., p. 458. Smith's paper received a detailed examination and rebuttal by Joseph Jacobs, "Are There Totem-Clans in the Old Testament?" The Archaeological Review, III (1889), 145-64.

totemism, the belief that a group of human beings were physically related to some species of animal or plant, were once as integral to the social life of the ancient Semites as they were to the life of all other early peoples. When he wrote Kinship, Smith was still thinking about totemism as primarily a necessary adjunct to a kinship system. As the title of the book suggests he was interested in the history of Arabian marriage customs. But he believed the Arab practice of exogamy could work only if some corresponding means of recognizing kinship identity also existed. In Smith's words, "Such an idea as this could not be conceived by savages in an abstract form; it must necessarily have had a concrete expression, or rather must have been thought under a concrete and tangible form, and that form seems always to have been supplied by totemism."[79] But it is also apparent from this book that Smith had begun to see totemism in connection with a variety of religious phenomena. For instance, he attempted to explain food taboos and the division of animals into clean and unclean as functions of totemic beliefs.[80]

The relationship of totemism to sacrifice was first treated in his article "Sacrifice," written in 1887 for the Encyclopedia Britannica. While it is clear that he was moving in new directions, in this article Smith had not yet formulated his ultimate position. He distinguished between two main types of sacrifice: the honorific, in which the deity receives a gift and where the relationship of man and god is one of essential friendship, and the piacular, in which the deity demands the sacrifice of a life in order to quell his wrath. In the latter

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[79] Kinship, pp. 218-19. [80] Ibid., pp. 307-12.

type the worshippers have no right to count on the god's good will.

In the honorific sacrifice, which Smith believed was the more common and more natural type, the gift was one of homage or tribute to the deity. "In almost all nations," he wrote, "we find that the chief sacrificial feasts are associated with the harvest and vintage, or, where pastoral life predominates are regulated by the time at which the flocks bear their young; at these seasons tribute of first-fruits and firstlings is given the gods of the good things they themselves have given to the inhabitants of the land."[81] A sacrifice in the most essential sense was a meal offered to the god. There is little to distinguish what Smith had said thus far from E. B. Tylor's gift theory of primitive sacrifice. But Smith went on to note that in societies of the most antique type, that is, totem societies, the animal sacrifices had a peculiar quality because of the special sanctity accorded some animal species. The sacrificial animal, he reasoned, could not be the totem of the group, for this would be to shed a clansman's blood. It would be more natural to offer in sacrifice an animal which was the totem of some enemy clan. Such totemic sacrifice took the form of a meal in which men and their god devoured the flesh of an enemy totem and thereby cast scorn on the enemy.

Piacular sacrifices did not involve a meal but the victim was executed in order to placate the wrath of the god. In totemic societies the clan animal would be sacrificed as a substitute for a human victim. The piaculum was especially resorted to in times of communal calamity.

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[81] Encyclopedia Britannica, XXI, 133.

Smith's next statement about sacrifice is found in his last book, The Religion of the Semites. The interesting development in this work is that he attempted to formulate an arch-type for all sacrificial worship and to see the differing conceptions summarized above as outgrowths of this most elementary form. The resulting theory is usually called the communion theory in distinction to Tylor's gift theory. Everything in this theory depended on the supposed divinity of the totemic animal. Smith's evidence for this supposition was based on the following line of inference.

> Now if kinship between the gods and their worshippers, on the one hand, and kinship between gods and certain kinds of animals on the other, are deep-seated principles of Semitic religion, . . . we must necessarily conclude that kinship between families of men and animal kinds was an idea equally deep-seated, and we shall expect to find that sacred animals whenever they occur, will be treated with the regard which men pay to their kinsfolk.[82]

But since the sanctity of a kinsman's life and the sanctity of the godhead are identical principles then "whatever partakes in this life is holy, and its holiness may be described indifferently, as participation in the divine life and nature, or as participation in the kindred blood."[83] By this somewhat tortured or, at the least, circuitous route Smith thought he had established the divinity of the totem animal. The meaning of the eating of the totem animal by the worshippers now took on a different light.

In ancient times eating and drinking with anyone signified a bond of fellowship. This bond was not one of mere hospitality but involved the commensals in mutual social obligations. For instance when two Arabs ate together, even though not related by blood ties,

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[82] Religion of the Semites, p. 289. [83] Ibid., p. 289.

they bound themselves together, from the time when the food was in their bodies, into a relationship equivalent to kinship. They took on all the obligations of kinship, even participation in each other's blood feuds. A more permanent bond of kinship could be made by opening veins and drinking each other's blood.[84] If such was the understanding of eating and sharing blood on the human level then meals shared with a god, that is sacrificial meals, were also ways of affirming that the god and his worshippers were of one substance, one kindred.

The animal victim in a totem sacrifice was both brother, god, and food. We must hear Smith at length on this crucial point.

> In the most primitive times, . . . the sacred function [i.e., sacrifice] is the act of the whole community, which is conceived as a circle of brethren, united with one another and with their god by participation in one life or life-blood. The same blood is supposed to flow in the veins of the victim, so that its death is at once a shedding of the tribal blood and a violation of the sanctity of the divine life that is transfused through every member, human or irrational of the sacred circle. Nevertheless the slaughter of such a victim is permitted or required on solemn occasions, and all the tribesmen partake of its flesh, that they may thereby cement and seal their mystic unity with one another and their god. . . . This cement is nothing else than the actual life of the sacred and kindred animal, which is conceived as residing in its flesh, but especially in its blood, and so, in the sacred meal, is actually distributed among all the participants, each of whom incorporates a particle of it with his own individual life.[85]

The leading idea of sacrifice as Smith here envisaged it was neither a mere gift to the god nor the offering of a vicarious victim. Both of these were later attenuations of the original thought in which god and his worshippers partook in common of a divine victim.

The only description of a sacrificial rite that even remotely approximated this "totem meal" as Smith conceived it was that recorded

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[84] Ibid., pp. 312-14. [85] Ibid., p. 313.

by St. Nilus, a fourth century monk of the Sinai peninsula. He described a ritual which he had seen Arab bedouins enact. That his sole illustration of the most primitive Semitic sacrifice derived from so late a date apparently caused Smith no embarrassment. The comparative method guaranteed the real antiquity of the practices of such obviously primitive people. Smith's summary of Nilus' record is as follows:

> Now, in the oldest known form of Arabian sacrifice, as described by Nilus, the camel chosen as the victim is bound upon a rude altar of stones piled together, and when the leader of the band has thrice led the worshippers round the altar in a solemn procession accompanied with chants, he inflicts the first wound while the last words of the hymn are still upon the lips of the congregation, and in all haste drinks of the bloodthat gushes forth. Forthwith the whole company fall on the victim with their swords, hacking off pieces of the quivering flesh and devouring them raw with such wild haste, that in the short interval between the rise of the day star which marked the hour for the service to begin, and the disappearance of its rays before the rising sun, the entire camel, body and bones, skin and entrails, is devoured. . . .[86]

Smith explained that the important factors here were two: the slaying of the camel on an altar thereby conveying the living blood to the godhead whose symbol the altar was, and the eating of the living flesh by the worshippers who in so eating absorbed the victim's life into themselves. Smith failed to comment on the question of whether the camel was a totem of the people in question or whether they in any sense held it to be an animal instinct with divine power or life. His assumption was that the ritual was at least a survival from a time when the Semites had held such beliefs.

The foregoing summary of Smith's ideas may strike the reader as quite remote from the picture of sacrificial worship as it existed among

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[86] Ibid., p. 338. The delightful comment of one scholar on this passage was, "And as regards St. Nilus' camel, I am still of the opinion that it does not deserve to have so heavy a weight as the genesis of a part of the history of religion laid on its hump." Quoted in Schmidt, op. cit., p. 109.

the Israelites of Biblical history. It should be borne in mind, however, that Smith thought of the Mosaic system of sacrifice as standing almost at the opposite end of the history of the evolution of Semitic sacrifice from that which we have here described. And yet it can be fairly said that Smith thought the seeds of Biblical ideas of sacrifice were foreshadowed in these ancient heathen rites. He did not even exempt the soteriology of the New Testament from a genetic connection with totem sacrifice. (In the quotation that follows the reference to the "voluntary death of the divine victim" pertains to various beliefs that an animal through certain stipulated actions offered itself for sacrifice.) Speaking of the death of Christ, Smith wrote:

> That the God-man dies for His people, and that His death is their life, is an idea foreshadowed by the oldest mystical sacrifices. It was foreshadowed, indeed, in a very crude and materialistic form, and without any of those ethical ideas which the Christian doctrine of atonement derives from a profounder sense of sin and divine justice. And yet the voluntary death of the divine victim, which we have seen to be a conception not foreign to the ancient sacrificial ritual, contained the germ of the deepest thought in the Christian doctrine; the thought that the Redeemer gives Himself for His people, that "for their sakes He consecrates Himself, that they also might be consecrated in truth."[87]

Not everyone would formulate the connection in such pious phrases. At least one writer has argued that Smith's theory of totemism throws light on the origins of Catholic Christianity in that it "assimilates the Sacrament of the Eucharist to the very lowest savage superstitions marking the first traceable advent of make-believe and hypocrisy in religion. It confirms as nothing else could confirm the Catholic view of the institution, but at the expense of replacing it in a whole

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[87] Religion of the Semites, first edition (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1889), p. 393. This passage was deleted from the second edition. The preparation of the second edition was Smith's last literary project, carried out on his deathbed.

cycle of beliefs such as no educated and rational human being could entertain." But, alas, the writer concludes, Smith wrote at a time when the High Church party "had made neo-totemism the very center of public worship."[88]

Such ideas as Smith presented in The Religion of the Semites could not but engender violent controversy. Particularly the central idea, that of totem sacrifice, met with sharp rebuttal from diverse quarters.[89] It is safe to say that today the idea is almost unanimously rejected by anthropologists of religion.[90] Still in its time it had a strong appeal to many scholars and assumed the status of received doctrine in some quarters.[91] Smith's idea of sacrifice probably gained

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[88] A. W. Benn, The History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century (2 vols.; London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1906), pp. 466-69.

[89] For instance Vincez Zapletal, Der Totemismus und die Religion Israel (Freiburg, 1901), which is extensively reviewed by S. A. Cook, "Israel and Totemism," Jewish Quarterly Review (1902), 413-48; also H. Hubert et M. Mauss, "Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice," L'Année Sociologique (1898), English trans. by W. D. Halls, Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function (London: Cohen & West, 1964).

[90] So Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion, p. 52, wrote: "All one can say of the theory as a whole, the argument of which is in the main both tortuous and tenuous, is that, whilst eating of the totem animal could have been the earliest form of sacrifice and the origin of religion, there is no evidence that it was. . . ."
"Bluntly, all Robertson Smith does is to guess about a period of Semitic history about which we know almost nothing." Claude Levi-Strauss, Totemism, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 102, calls totemism "an illusion which is dissipated by a more rigorous analysis of the facts on which it was erected. . . ."

[91] Probably the most zealous of all Smith's popularizers was F. B. Jevons. See for instance his, Introduction to the History of Religions (London: Methuen & Co., 1896).

its most extensive dissemination through the writings of Sigmund Freud which of course have been translated into most of the world's major languages.[92]

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[92]On the impact of The Religion of the Semites on Freud see Ernest Jones, The Life and Works of Sigmund Freud (3 vols.; New York: Basic Books, 1955), II, 353. For Freud's incorporation of Smith's "totem meal" into a psycho-analytic interpretation of the origin of religion see his Totem and Taboo.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Before making some final remarks about the overall significance of Smith's thought we shall outline the major events of the concluding years of Smith's life.

Following his dismissal from the Hebrew Chair in 1881, Smith accepted a post as editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The ninth edition had been progressing under the direction of Thomas S. Baynes. The last thirteen of its twenty-four volumes were edited by Smith. This project occupied much of his time until 1888. Smith enlisted the services of scores of illustrious British and continental scholars. His correspondence in this connection could in itself provide an enlightening chapter in the intellectual life of the times. Smith personally wrote over two hundred articles for the Encyclopedia.[1] The majority of these articles dealt with Biblical and Semitic subjects. In these articles, as in those he solicited from such scholars as Wellhausen, Hatch, Nöldeke, Schürer, and Harnack, there was further opportunity to advance the popular understanding of higher criticism.

In connection with Smith's role in the promotion of the popular understanding of Old Testament higher criticism we should note, too, the public lectures he gave to large audiences in Edinburgh and Glasgow

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[1]The most important of these articles are listed in the Appendix.

in 1881 and 1882. The lectures were subsequently published in two books entitled The Old Testament in the Jewish Church and The Prophets of Israel. Together they comprise the first comprehensive statement in English of the radical reconstruction of Old Testament history that was coming to be called the Graf-Wellhausen theory.[1] Speaking of the second series of lectures, that on The Prophets of Israel, Black and Chrystal noted that "they accepted as established the two great negations."

> They almost wholly ignore the "predictive" element--as that had formerly been understood--in the prophets' work; and they convey with unmistakable clearness that it was no part of the prophets' business to preach a return to "Mosaism," for the simple reason that Mosaism as we now understand it had not yet come into being.[2]

In 1883 Smith was appointed Lord Almoner's Reader in Arabic at Cambridge University.[3] The responsibilities of this post were light enough that they did not interfere with his work on the Encyclopedia Britannica. Smith went to Cambridge with the express understanding that he was to avoid all theological and Biblical matters in his teaching.[4] Yet, as our previous chapter made clear, he found in the study of Arabic literature an ample field for the development of his religious theories. His two last books, Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia (1885) and The Religion of the Semites (1889), were the fruit of his Arabic researches in Cambridge.

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[2] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., p. 458.

[3] Ibid., p. 468.

[4] Professor William Wright, the man most responsible for securing this post for Smith, wrote to him: "If you are appointed, you would have to avoid in your teaching all theological and Biblical matters. In fact you would have to keep pretty strictly to your Arabic. Any lecturing on Biblical or theological matters would be resented by the Divinity Professors (four or five in number) and the regular Professor of Hebrew." Smith MSS, 7449-4.

In 1886 Smith took on another major administrative responsibility, one that robbed him of yet more of the time he could well have devoted to his own specialized studies. Recognizing the tremendous breadth of Smith's interests and bibliographical knowledge, the masters of Cambridge University elected him University Librarian. Though this was a position carrying considerable prestige there were numerous tasks involved that hardly seemed worthy of Smith's great mental powers. Writing in 1886 to his friend James Irvine Smith, he indicated the nature of his occupations:

> My time is divided between the Encyclopedia, the revision of the Apocrypha, and the Library. The latter of course is the most engrossing master. At present I am working steadily through a mass of arrears, for Bradshaw with all his virtues was sorely given to letting arrears accumulate. I have just catalogued some oriental books that have been lying by for sixteen years.[5]

It seems likely that the work load that Smith carried at this time contributed to the breakdown of his health and so to his untimely death. His vitality seems to have declined steadily after 1887. But it was not until 1889, after he had left his library post to become Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic, that his ill health began to cause serious alarm. His condition fluctuated for some time but seriously handicapped his activities.[6] According to James Bryce, a close

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[5]Letter dated 21 October 1886, Smith, MSS, 7449-2.

[6]Black and Chrystal discuss these health problems at some length, op. cit., pp. 528-56. Despite his failing health and the sometimes onerous nature of his work, Smith seemed to be quite happy during his Cambridge years. He lived at Trinity College from 1883 to 1885 and at Christ's, as a Fellow, from 1885 until his death. He was evidently a popular figure in the University and was able to form several deep friendships. Among his closest friends in Cambridge were James Bryce, the noted historian and diplomat, and James George Frazer, who shared Smith's interest in primitive religions. Both Bryce and Frazer published adulatory biographical sketches of their friend after his death. See James Bryce, Studies in Contemporary Biography (London: The

companion to Smith at the time, it was not until 1892 that Smith's tubercular condition was properly diagnosed. Of the occasion when Smith learned the true character of his illness Bryce recalled:

> The nature of the disease of which he died was disclosed to him by his physicians in September 1892, while an international Congress of Orientalists, in which he presided over the Semitic section, was holding its meetings. A festival dinner was being given in honour of the Congress the same afternoon. When the physician had spoken, Smith simply remarked, "This means the death my brother died." (One of his brothers died of the same malady a few years before.) He went straight to the dinner and was throughout the evening the gayest and brightest of guests.[7]

Smith put up a brave fight against his disease for another eighteen months but finally succumbed on 30 March 1894 in the middle of his forty-seventh year. His passing was mourned by friends and admirers around the world.[8]

It is regrettable that we do not have any detailed statement from Smith at the end of his life setting forth his personal spiritual convictions with the same degree of clarity that marked his early theological essays. There is reason to think his views had undergone some revision since he left his Free Church professorate. James Bryce

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Macmillan Company, 1903), pp. 311-26, and James George Frazer, Sir Roger de Coverley and Other Literary Pieces, pp. 194-211.

[7]James Bryce, op. cit., pp. 326-27.

[8]To a certain class of people, particularly in his native country, Smith had become the symbol of enlightenment and spiritual progress. He was a martyr in the fight against a bigoted dogmatism. The following words written to John Sutherland Black at the time of Smith's death by Jane Whyte, wife of a Free Church minister, are indicative of the honor in which Smith was held in some quarters: "Often have I wished it had been possible just once to thank him for the great things he did for us in those vivid years, 1878-80. It was little short of a Vita Nuova: intellectually it certainly was that. . . . It was a great time and if your friend was sacrificed . . . his blood has been the seed of truth." Quoted in Barbour, op. cit., p. 222.

recalled that Smith had told him at some time around 1888 that he could no longer undertake any clerical duties. Bryce explained that Smith "had a sensitive conscience and held that no clergyman ought to use language in the pulpit which did not express his personal convictions."[9] But what were these "personal convictions"?

Smith's last major piece of scholarship was the Burnett Lecture series that he delivered at the University of Aberdeen in the winters 1888, 1889, and 1890. The subject of these lectures as arranged with the trustees was to be "the primitive religions of the Semitic peoples viewed in relation to the spiritual religion of the Old Testament and Christianity."[10] Smith fulfilled this assignment only with great difficulty. The first year's lectures, published in 1889 under the title The Religion of the Semites gave promise of the grand scheme that Smith hoped to carry through. But due to his failing health he had to prepare and deliver the last two series of lectures under very adverse circumstances. He was by then a semi-invalid and capable of little exertion. He had to draw heavily on the content of old lectures. The surviving rough notes from which he spoke give plain evidence of his physical weakness.

In these notes we have Smith's last personal statement on the subject of Biblical religion. Speaking with specific reference to the Creation and Patriarchal narratives of Genesis but also with an eye back on the whole train of his previous argument Smith said:

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[9]Bryce, op. cit., p. 321.

[10]The Religion of the Semites, preface to the first edition, p. v.

> In them God communes with men without lowering Himself to the level of man; He has no human passions or affections, for His love of His chosen people is far above the weakness of human preferences. Above all He is the God of the whole world before He is Israel's God; while in all the Semitic legends the Demiurge himself is always and above all the local king.
>
> The burden of explaining this contrast does not lie with us; it falls on those who are compelled by a false philosophy of revelation to see in the Old Testament nothing more than the highest point of the general tendency of Semitic religion. That is not the view that study has commended to me. It is a view that is not commended but condemned by the many parallelisms in detail between Hebrew and heathen history and ritual. For all these material points of resemblance only makes the contrast in spirit more remarkable.[11]

We are inclined to agree with Black and Chrystal that these words are "somewhat surprising" and "dissonant" with "the general trend and tenor of the previous learned and elaborate argument." For as Black and Chrystal point out if the Religion of the Semites means anything, "it means that the process of religious evolution has been continuous."[12] Whence then the gap and contrast which Smith claims to see in the end? Can it be that Smith really saw the general thrust of his work as pointing in the direction suggested by the quotation? Such was indeed the case. Smith failed to draw the conclusions which many another scholar would draw on the basis of Smith's researches.[13] To the end his faith was

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[11] Smith MSS, 7476-4.

[12] Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 537, 572.

[13] If Smith's mantle as an anthropologist of religion fell on any of his disciples it was on James George Frazer. Frazer, it seems, came closer to recognizing the real direction of Smith's speculations than Smith had. In a work dedicated to Smith, the first volume of which Smith had read and criticized in proof, and in which as Frazer says the central theme of a slain god is derived from Smith's writings, Frazer made the following estimate of the impact of the study of comparative religion on the traditional religious conceptions of the West: "The Comparative Study of the beliefs and institutions of mankind is fitted . . . to expedite progress if it lays bare certain weak spots in the foundations on which modern society is built--if it shews that much

not shaken in the essential uniqueness of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition and in the special revelation to be found in the Bible. Though we should perhaps not attach too much weight to the words, Smith is recorded as having said on his death bed that he wished he could live in order to finish a book in which he would "show to the world the divine Revelation of God in the Old Testament."[14]

There is a good deal of truth in the statement made about Smith by a not too friendly writer shortly after Smith died to the effect that he had "pursued the methods of rationalistic literary analysis while holding the faith of Bibliolatrous superstition." This writer goes on to explain:

> A few years' work at the textual problems served to put him in the rational or naturalistic attitude on the strictly textual questions. How then was it that he never got any farther? How came he, after realising that not only Biblical literature as a whole, but nearly every ostensible homogeneous section, is a structure of various and divergent hands, plans, times, ideals--how came he still to

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which we are wont to regard as solid rests on the sands of superstition rather than on the rock of nature. It is indeed a melancholy and in some respects thankless task to strike at the foundations of beliefs in which, as in a strong tower, the hopes and aspirations of humanity through long ages have sought a refuge from the storm and stress of life. Yet sooner or later it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should breach these venerable walls, mantled over with the ivy and mosses and wild flowers of a thousand tender and sacred associations. At present we are only dragging the guns into position: they have hardly yet begun to speak. The task of building up into fairer and more enduring forms the old structures so rudely shattered is reserved for other hands, perhaps for other and happier ages. We cannot foresee, we can hardly even guess, the new forms into which thought and society will run in the future. Yet this uncertainty ought not to induce us, from any consideration of expediency or regard for antiquity, to spare the ancient moulds, however beautiful, when these are proved to be out-worn. Whatever comes of it, wherever it leads us, we must follow truth alone." James Gordon Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, Vol. I: The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings (2d ed.; London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1900), pp. xxv-xxvi.

[14] Cook and Raven, op. cit., p. 16.

> think that these composites are products of "revelation" and "inspiration" in a sense in which no other or extra-Christian literature is? . . . But Smith, with all his analysis, was at heart unspotted from the world of reason, and held to the doctrine of the special inspiration of the Judaic and Christian religions, expressly pointing to Mohammed as clearly a "false" prophet, and to Paul as clearly an "inspired" writer. This seems to have been his attitude to the end; though the results of his latest scrutiny of early Semitic religion make that a "natural" religion or nothing.[15]

The foregoing study has been at pains to show the origins and development of Robertson Smith's world of thought. If our understanding has been correct the final paradox in Smith's thinking, to which we have called attention in the paragraphs immediately above, should really not be so surprising. Both in his Biblical scholarship and in his anthropology we have shown that Smith was influenced by the theological and philosophical presuppositions he adopted while in early manhood. In this connection the importance of Smith's attachment to Kantian epistemology should not be underestimated. This was the source of his rejection of all natural theology and of the role of reason in validating the claims of historical revelation. Kant had severely restricted the scope of man's knowledge of the world. The Transcendent Cause of which natural theology would speak no less than the trans-subjective reality of God's action in history were relinquished by all who had received their philosophical baptism in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. Kant's philosophy, then, is one source of the absolute dualism which Smith adopted in his religious epistemology. This dualism was reinforced by the influence on Smith of certain post-Kantian theologians. From Schleiermacher, Rothe, and Ritschl he learned to distinguish between true religious feeling and relatively true theological

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[15]Quoted by Black and Chrystal, op. cit., pp. 571-72.

formulations, between Revelation itself and the Bible as a fallible documentary record of it, between empirical judgments of fact and the value judgments of faith which alone form the content of theology. Not only did such formulations render impossible for him the older belief in a verbally inspired Bible; these same philosophical and theological sources provided Smith with the positive formulations he needed for defending his evangelical, creedal understanding of Christianity when, through higher criticism and the comparative study of religions, he had subjected the Old Testament background of Christianity to a natural, evolutionary interpretation. By distinguishing between the words of Scripture and the Word of God, Smith could remove confessional propositions from the realm of historical verification. The inner witness of the Holy Spirit became the sole arbiter of the reality of encounter with the Word. Neither historical criticism nor the comparative study of religion could invalidate the Bible as a vehicle for conveying God's Word. Smith then could maintain the real difference between Hebrew and other Semitic religions while admitting to the most damaging similarities at the purely empirical level. As the critic quoted above puts it, "Smith was at heart unspotted from the world of reason."

In the same year that Smith delivered the last of his Burnett Lectures, Thomas Huxley wrote an essay discussing the trends in theology and Biblical criticism. He concluded his very perceptive piece by predicting that, given the evident trends, in the not distant future some apologist for Christianity would be found speaking along the following lines:

> The last century has seen the growth of scientific criticism to its full strength. The whole world of history has been revolutionized and the mythology which embarrassed earnest Christians has vanished

> in an evil mist, the lifting of which has only more fully revealed the lineaments of infallible Truth. No longer in contact with fact of any kind, Faith stands now forever proudly inaccessible to the attacks of the infidel.[16]

Huxley had unwittingly uttered his prophecy post eventum. He could have quoted words from the writings of Robertson Smith and have made his point even more effectively. Of course Huxley's purpose was to heap scorn on those who, as he said, "having distilled away every inconvenient matter of fact in Christian history, continue to pay divine honours to the residue."[17] The scorn which Huxley felt for such thinking is justly deserved because it makes the question of religious truth and error all but insoluble. An anthropological analysis of religion such as Smith attempted in The Religion of the Semites, from which standpoint no religion is false, for all religions answer to human needs and are grounded in social "realities," also leaves unanswered and perhaps unanswerable the question of how faith and fact are related.

In this study we pointed to some epistemological problems which the historicizing of thought has raised for Christian theology. We end by concluding that in retracing the road Smith traveled we have been given a deeper appreciation of these problems but that he has not led us out of the wilderness. The following statement by the sociologist Peter Berger, framed from a point of reference Smith would have appreciated, will serve to make clear again the nature of the epistemological difficulty which has been constantly in our thoughts while working on this study.

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[16] Thomas H. Huxley, Science and Hebrew Tradition (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), p. 238.

[17] Ibid., p. 237.

> The magna quaestio of sociology is formally very similar to that of history: How, in a world of socio-historical relativity, can one arrive at an "Archimedean point" from which to make cognitively valid statements about religious matters? In terms of sociological theory there are certain variants to this question: If all religious propositions are, at least, also projections grounded in specific infrastructures, how is one to distinguish between those that give birth to truth and those that give birth to error? And if all religious plausibility is susceptible to "social engineering," how can one be sure that those propositions (or, for that matter, "religious experiences") that are plausible to oneself are not just that--products of "social engineering"--and nothing else?[18]

Berger notes that between those who for some reason have not yet been touched by the "vertigo of relativity" and those "radical theologians" who have despaired of finding an answer there has been a middle position for those who like to have their cake and eat it too. This is the position that suggested itself to Smith. In Berger's words this middle way "posits an Archimedean point in a sphere immune to relativization. This is the sphere of 'the Word,' as proclaimed in the kerygma of the church and as grasped by faith."[19] The trouble with this route is that it has no adequate defense against a Feuerbachian reinterpretation of Christian theology in terms of a wholly naturalized anthropology.[20] In

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[18]Berger, op. cit., pp. 183-84. [19]Ibid., p. 185.

[20]Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957). See in this connection, Joseph C. Weber, "Feuerbach, Barth, and Theological Method," The Journal of Religion, XLVI (1966), 23-36. Weber correctly places Feuerbach in the wake of the Kantian revolution in philosophy. What Weber says about Ritschl and Feuerbach applies equally well to Smith and Feuerbach. "The dominant theologian in Germany toward the end of the century, Albrecht Ritschl, tried to establish a kind of epistemology that would allow the possibility of some kind of 'perception' of God. Ritschl vehemently denied the possibility of knowing God in Himself. Rather, we know God's meaning for us when we execute a 'value judgment' about the significance of the historical Jesus for us. He seemed unwittingly almost to agree with Feuerbach. In spite of his trying to tie faith to the historical Jesus, faith's real origin is in the value judgment of the believer. It is difficult to see how such a theology could defend

fact, Smith's position in his Burnett Lectures goes far toward accrediting the Feuerbachian analysis of religion. The humanistic or anthropomorphic equivalents into which Feuerbach translated the entire range of Christian doctrine might be resented by a thinker of Smith's stripe but could hardly be refuted. The objective, publicly accessible point of reference which such a refutation would require had been precluded by Smith's own ground rules.

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itself against Feuerbach's question. If Ritschlian theology had really felt the threat of Feuerbach's reduction, one wonders whether it could have finally convinced even itself that theology had to do with anything more than the expression of man in his quest of humanity: precisely, man making value judgments about the meaning of God for man." pp. 28-29. Weber is also correct in his statement of the susceptibility of Barthian theology to a Feuerbachian critique. "Barthian theology may regard itself to be more secure from the attacks of Feuerbach because it in no way tries to establish the validity of talking about revelation in some human possibility. But when Barth shows that revelation is not open to normal means of verification, this could mean it is in no way verifiable. It would then be meaningless to try to understand revelation as Barth does. When we look closer at Barth's theology we see that the ultimate verification of revelation appears in the faith of the believer who confesses that this faith is not his own possibility. Rather, it is grounded in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. But can one then not respond by pointing out that in fact the actuality of revelation is just the subjective faith of the believer?" p. 32. After this admission, Weber's attempt to save Barth from Feuerbach hardly seems convincing. He says in fact that Feuerbach cannot be ultimately refuted by rational argument. "However, Barth has overcome Feuerbach theologically. He has done so simply by taking the faith of the Church more seriously than Feuerbach's attack on the faith. The final possibility for theology is the faith of the Church which inexorably refers us to the reality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ." Ibid. To admit the circularity of Barth's position, as Weber does, and thereby declare his immunity from Feuerbach's attack on theology, is hardly a satisfying result. A more promising approach to a sound theological method would be to insist that claims about historical realities that transcend normal human experience (e.g., The Christ Event or the Resurrection) must also at least be open to normal historical, empirical verification. Only if the "encounter" can be described in propositional language and is at least potentially verifiable by an open minded historian will the epistemological problem which Christianity faces be resolved. The strength of the verbal inspiration position that Robertson Smith jettisoned was its insistence on the integrity of the propositional

Smith was a man of great genius and learning. It has been a privilege to try to enter into his system of thought and to gain from him insight into the intellectual and spiritual life of the past century. If we have emphasized certain problems in Smith's thought we did so because the difficulties raised for us by his work are symptomatic of problems endemic to modern intellectual life. Smith would have welcomed the cooperation of any honest truth seeker in working out these issues. It was in this confidence that we have carried through this study of Smith's life and thought.

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content of Biblical Faith. It refused to separate judgments of fact from judgments of value. Integrity also demanded that these propositions, insofar as they relate to the stage of history, run the risk of historical refutation. This is what the proponents of Biblical inerrancy sometimes failed to see.

APPENDIX

A Bibliography of the Published Writings of William Robertson Smith[1]

1868 "Prophecy and Personality" (January), Essays, pp. 97-108.

1869 "Christianity and the Supernatural" (January), Essays, pp. 109-36.

"Mill's Theory of Geometrical Reasoning," PRSE, VI (February), 477-83. (Reprinted in Essays, pp. 3-12.)

"Hegel and the Metaphysics of the Fluxional Calculus," TRSE, XXV (May), 491-511. (Reprinted in Essays, pp. 13-43.)

"The Work of a Theological Society" (November), Essays, pp. 137-62.

Letter on Stirling's interpretation of Hegel, The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 28 December.

1870 "On the Flow of Electricity in Conducting Surfaces," PRSE, VII (February), 79-99. (Reprinted in Essays, pp. 44-46.)

"The Question of Prophecy in the Critical Schools of the Continent," British Quarterly Review, LI (April), 313-43. (Reprinted in Essays, pp. 163-206.)

"On Professor Bain's Theory of Euclid I. 4," PRSE, VII (June), 176-79. (Reprinted in Essays, pp. 67-70.)

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[1]Throughout this bibliography the following abbreviations have been used: Essays stands for J. S. Black and G. Chrystal (eds.), Lectures and Essays of William Robertson Smith (London, 1912). PRSE stands for Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. TRSE stands for Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. BFER stands for for British and Foreign Evangelical Review. EB stands for Encyclopedia Britannica, ninth edition.

The preparation of this bibliography was greatly facilitated by dependence on the work done by Jesse H. Brown, op. cit. Except for some minor additions and a correction the following agrees with Brown's bibliography.

1870 [Cont.] "What History Teaches Us to Seek in the Bible" (November), Essays, pp. 207-36.

1871 "The Fulfillment of Prophecy" (January), Essays, pp. 253-84.

"Dutch Periodicals," BFER, XX (July), 579-84.

Review of The Hebrew Prophets, vol. II, by Rowland Williams, and The Minor Prophets, vol. IV, by E. E. Pusey, BFER, XX (July), 596-99.

"The Place of the Old Testament in Religious Instruction" (September), Essays, pp. 285-93.

1872 "Dutch Periodicals," BFER, XXI (January), 162-66.

"Introductory Lecture on the Psalms," Essays (March), pp. 294-308.

Review of Commentarius in Vatacinium Michal, by A. T. Roorda, BFER, XXI (April), 388-91.

Review of Geschiedkindige Nasporingen, by D. C. Sepp, BFER, XXI (July), 607-12.

"Extracts from Early Lectures," (Portions of seven lectures delivered between June 19, 1870, and December 13, 1872). Essays, pp. 235-52.

1873 "German Periodicals," BFER, XXII (January), 171-75.

"Dutch Periodicals," BFER, XXII (January), 175-79.

"German and Dutch Periodicals," BFER, XXII (April), 376-84.

"Dr. Stirling, Hegel, and the Mathematicians," Fortnightly Review, XIII (April), 495-510. (Reprinted in Essays, pp. 71-93.)

"German and Dutch Periodicals," BFER, XXII (July), 585-89.

Review of The Theology of the Old and New Testaments, vols. I and II, by H. Ewald, Academy, IV (October), 369-70.

1874 "Dutch and German Periodicals," BFER, XXIII (January), 176-82.

"German Periodicals," BFER, XXIII (April), 375-78.

Review of An Introductory Hebrew Grammar, with Progressive Exercises in Reading and Writing, by A. B. Davidson, BFER (April), 382-83.

"The Place of Theology in the Work and Growth of the Church," BFER, XXIII (July), 413-40. (Reprinted in Essays, pp. 309-40.)

1874 [Cont.] "German and Dutch Periodicals," BFER, XXIII (July), 573-79.

"German and Dutch Periodicals," BFER, XXIII (October), 789-93.

1875 "German Periodicals," BFER, XXIV (January), 157-60.

Review of De Spenken van Jezus, den Zoon van Sirach and De Apocriefe Boeken des Ouden Verbonds, by J. Dyserinck, BFER, XXIV (January), 182-83.

Review of Fragments of a Samaritan Targum, by J. W. Nutt, BFER, XXIV (January), 183.

Review of Jewish History and Politics in the Times of Sargon and Sennacherib: An Inquiry into the Historical Meaning and Purpose of the Prophecies of Isaiah, by E. Strachey, BFER, XXIV (January), 184.

Review of Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew, by S. R. Driver, BFER, XXIV (January), 185-87.

Review of Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments, vol. III, by H. Ewald, Academy, VII (February), 169-70.

"The Origin of the Jewish Week," Nature, XI (March), 363.

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